

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL IN THE FAMILY OF GOD:  
THE POLARIZATION OF UNITED METHODISM

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## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this thesis project to my wonderful wife, Shanna, and my three amazing kids, Jordan, Abigail, and Andrew. You have been incredible throughout this process and I will never be able to thank you enough for allowing me to be gone so often for schooling, study, and writing. To each of you, I dedicate this thesis. Thank you.

## ABSTRACT

The once vibrant United Methodist Church is losing members at an alarming rate. Although fingers are being pointed in all directions, no one seems to want to take responsibility for the collapse. The church has become an organization that treats symptoms, but continues to overlook the problem. This thesis will look past those symptoms in order to obtain a clear diagnosis of the underlying problem that exists in the church today. It will be discovered that polarization is that problem. It is the byproduct of years of theological, doctrinal, and missional conflict between the two dominant political polarities of the church: the progressive liberal polarity and the conservative evangelical polarity. It will be discovered that the agendas of each polarity are guided by a long established set of intrinsic core values. When these values are in conflict, polarization occurs, and this is why the church continues to struggle.

## Chapter One

### The Problem and its Setting

There is a problem within the United Methodist Church and its effects are reaching around the globe. It is a problem complicated by a colorful and profitable past, a divisive and polarizing present, and, an increasingly ambiguous future. Yet, in the presence of that problem is the grace of God, manifest in the loving sacrifice of His people. This thesis is an account of the church's struggles with that problem and the following introductory quotes serve to preface its unveiling:

The primary threats to our survival, both of our organizations and of our societies, come not from sudden events but from slow, gradual processes.<sup>1</sup>

Systems produce what they are designed to produce, and the current UM system is designed to produce fewer congregations and fewer members.<sup>2</sup>

"United Methodist" is an oxymoron. We haven't been united for a long time. Others ridicule us as the "untied" Methodist Church.<sup>3</sup>

If we hope to see either a denominational separation or a reuniting of the left and the right as a faithful response to God's calling for all of us to be church, we must be clear in theological terms about why we must separate or why we should stay together before we determine how to separate or how to stay together.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter M. Senge, The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of The Learning Organization, (New York: Doubleday, 1990) 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, The Ice Cube is Melting: What is Really at Risk in United Methodism? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) 47.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Brown and Jody Brown, "Conservatives Say Methodists May Split Over Homosexuality," Crosswalk, 7 May 2004, 6 Sept. 2006 <<http://crosswalk.com/news/1261657.html?view=print>>.

<sup>4</sup> O. Wesley Allen, Jr., "How Divided Are United Methodists?" Religion-Online, Eds. Ted Brock and Winnie Brock, 15 June 2004, 6 Sept. 2006 <<http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=3059>>.

### Symptoms:

On 23 April 1968, the merger of the Methodist Episcopal Church with the Evangelical United Brethren Church gave birth to the newly formed United Methodist Church. As reported in the *Book of Discipline* (2004), there were approximately 11 million members at that time.<sup>5</sup> Just three years earlier (1965), records indicate that the Methodist Episcopal Church had a membership of 12.1 million and the Evangelical United Brethren Church recorded 840,000 members, indicating that three years prior to the merger the two denominations had a combined membership of nearly 13 million.

On the wedding day in 1968, as recorded in the *General Minutes of the Annual Conference 1970*, there were 10.9 million members. This indicates that during the three-year courtship, over two million members left their churches. Since 1968, the United Methodist Church has continued to lose members at an alarming rate, sliding to just under 8.2 million members. Combined statistics show that since 1965 when talks of merger officially began, membership has declined by a total of approximately 4.8 million members (see Appendix 1).

General Conference records from 1970<sup>6</sup> and 2004<sup>7</sup> reveal that, in 1968, there were a total of 41,901 churches compared to 34,892 in 2004, indicating a net loss over those 36 years of nearly 7,000 churches. Countering the decreasing number of churches, statistics reveal in the same two Conference

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<sup>5</sup> Harriett Jane Olson, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004) 19.

<sup>6</sup> The General Council of Finance and Administration, *General Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church 1970*, (Evanston: Section of Records and Statistics, 1970) 14.

<sup>7</sup> The General Council on Finance and Administration, *General Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church 2004*, (Nashville: General Council on Finance and Administration, 2004) 28.



Journals, that, over the past 35 years, the number of clergy climbed from 34,651 in 1969 (records not available for 1968) to 45,175. Granted, these numbers are confusing because in 1969, there were only 4 classifications of clergy compared to 23 classifications in 2004. In spite of a relatively stable number of available clergy, the closing of churches further reflects that there is a problem within the church.

Of course not all of the lost churches have been *dying* churches. There has been a new trend developing across the denomination of clergy *and* churches choosing to break ties with their connection to the United Methodist Church, including the Wedron United Methodist Church of Ottawa. Discouraged by denominational softening over the issue of homosexuality, the church voted to leave the fellowship of the United Methodist Church, and on July 30, 2006, the church members held their last worship service as United Methodists and abandoned their property. A week later, they reopened as the Victory Fellowship church.<sup>8</sup>

There has also been an increasing trend of clergy drop-out, some of which have been opting out of the connectional system and surrendering their credentials as United Methodist pastors, while others have been jumping ship to other denominations. Such is the case with Randy Jones, an ordained elder in the church with over 50 years of faithful service before making the decision to leave the denomination that he had grown to love. When asked why he decided to leave, he responded, “[I am] offended by the hypocrisy of a church that says if

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Bilyk, “Congregation splits with Methodist Church,” My Web Times, 11 Aug. 2006, 26 Sept. 2006 <<http://inottawa.com/ottnews/archives/ottawa/display.php?id=265376>>.

you lie, you can be a pastor; but if you tell the truth, you cannot.”<sup>9</sup> His comment is in regards to the church’s official stand on homosexual clergy.

The United Methodist Church also finds itself struggling with monetary issues. Enduring four decades of steady decline will certainly have an economic impact on any organization, and the church is certainly no exception; yet, church and denominational budgets continue to increase in response to rising healthcare costs for clergy, utility costs, litigation frequency, and infrastructure maintenance costs. It is no surprise then that, connectional ministries are taking huge hits each and every year. Colleges and universities are losing their chaplains; campgrounds are closing, and children’s homes are losing their support. A recent article from the *United Methodist News Service* indicates that the Red Bird Mission School in Beverly, Kentucky may have to close its doors after nearly 86 years of faithful service to the Red Bird Missionary Conference. The following article lays out one of their concerns. “The mission has enough money to operate through 2007, but if no more funds are received decisions will have to be made about what to cut. It could mean the loss of the school...most likely it would mean cutting out part of it, probably the high school since that is the most expensive part.”<sup>10</sup> Clearly, there is a connectional problem in the church.

The crises are also taking their toll on the church’s clergy and leadership. Health concerns are forcing many clergy out of their pulpits and into early

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<sup>9</sup> Herb Snyder and Jim Palmquist, “Another of Our Gifted Clergy Surrenders Credentials,” *Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns*, June 2005, 7 Sept. 2006 <<http://www.umaffirm.org/news/2005giftedclergy.html>>.

<sup>10</sup> Kathy L. Gilbert, “Red Bird Mission Experiencing Financial Shortfall,” *The United Methodist Church*, Ed. United Methodist News Service, 12 Dec. 2006, 22 Jan. 2007 <[http://umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUluE/b.2287391/k.CE93?Red\\_Bird\\_Mission\\_experien...](http://umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUluE/b.2287391/k.CE93?Red_Bird_Mission_experien...)>.

retirement where they are quickly introduced to the reality that, although they served the church faithfully, there just isn't enough money in the coffers to cover their long term care. Neill Caldwell, reporter for the United Methodist News Service writes,

Some in the denomination worry that the church will follow the lead of many secular corporations and be forced to eliminate health care coverage for its retirees...the annual conferences have no control over health care cost increases, which show little sign of slowing down. In an effort to hold on to these benefits, conferences have had to increase the level of cost-sharing on the part of participants in these plans, or have had to decrease options of coverage and eligibility.<sup>11</sup>

Clergy struggles are not limited to finances or healthcare concerns. With decreasing church membership also comes the pressure to reverse those trends in order to breathe new life into the local churches. This is a task not easily performed when the average stay of a United Methodist pastor is limited to a five or seven year term. This provokes many denominational leaders to question the effectiveness and methodology of the current appointment making process. Several research agencies have been commissioned to study current trends and to evaluate the habits of those churches which are being effective in evangelizing their communities. Their findings consistently support the notion that longer pastorates (10-12 years) are more likely to grow churches and nurture disciples than are shorter pastorates (3 to 5 years). Trends among United Methodist Congregations reveal that with every pastoral change, a major backlash occurs in regards to membership and attendance. Rick Warren writes, "A long pastorate

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<sup>11</sup> Neill Caldwell. "Rising Retiree Health Costs Pose Major Concern for Church," The United Methodist Church, Ed. United Methodist News Service, 22 June 2006, 17 Jan. 2007 <[http://www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUluE/b.1808645/k.C176/Rising\\_retiree\\_health\\_costs\\_...](http://www.umc.org/site/c.gjJTJbMUluE/b.1808645/k.C176/Rising_retiree_health_costs_...)>.

does not guarantee a church will grow, but changing pastors every few years guarantees a church *won't* grow.”<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime, there are several annual conferences which have begun developing programs to monitor clergy effectiveness. These programs are being used as a standard of measurement for clergy in areas such as connectional loyalty, relational inclusiveness, spiritual and physical wellness, and moral conduct. However, the programs are having a negative effect on many of the clergy and are causing anxiety, colleague distrust, and connectional withdrawal. As William H. Willimon writes, “a system based upon distrust, coercion, and authoritarianism has a way of producing the sort of leaders it demands.”<sup>13</sup>

One aspect of clergy assessment programs deals with disloyalty to the connection which may be manifested in ways such as not paying apportionments in full each year, refusal to participate in the clergy insurance plan, or not being fully compliant to inclusive or tolerance issues. Another aspect of assessment programs can be deemed discriminatory as they scrutinize weight or various other health concerns. Examples could include a sermon in support of war, the death penalty, discouraging abortion, or speaking out against homosexuality. In regards to these issues, the battle is becoming increasingly heated and hotly contested. Harder lines are being drawn in the sand, and distrust is escalating. Hope for reconciliation is decreasing, and bridges are being burned. There is a connectional problem in the church.

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<sup>12</sup> Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 31.

<sup>13</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon, A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 24.

In April of 2006, it was reported by the General Council of Finance and Administration that, in the year 2004, 42.1% of all United Methodist Churches did *not* receive even 1 member on profession of faith.<sup>14</sup> Just over 200 years earlier, John Wesley made it very clear to his young preachers that they had only one task before them- to save souls. "It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord."<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the denomination's history, the evangelistic fervor of both ministers and laity has been an earmark of Methodism. Times have changed. Today, evangelism is slowly being replaced by a spirit of universalism which equates anyone who does the work of an evangelist to a bigot or an ethnocentric racist. Today's United Methodist Church seems to be leaning towards an evangelism of presence and social action instead of an overtly vocal form of witnessing. When evangelism ceases, there is a problem in the church.

There *is* a problem in the United Methodist Church; and, if left undiagnosed and untreated, the problem will continue to grow, causing more and more damage to what Methodists have been working so hard to build for over 200 years. The symptoms are prevalent and include each of the concerns listed above- declining membership, declining health among clergy, the closing of churches, and the disconnecting of the connection, just to rename a few.

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<sup>14</sup> "The State of Our Connection," GCFA, April, 2006, United Methodist Church, 4 April 2007 <<http://www.gcfa.org>>.

<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Coleman, "Nothing to Do But Save Souls." Good News Nov/Dec 1998: 12.

However, symptoms are never the problem; and, throughout the church, excessive amounts of resources are being utilized for the purposes of treating symptoms. Bishop Edward Tullis writes, “We deal largely with symptoms, and do not get to the profound spiritual crises that confronts us as a church.”<sup>16</sup> Simply stated, the treating of symptoms can only bring temporary relief from a worsening condition and may not be worthy of so much time and attention.

The symptoms are not going away. They continue to appear, and they continue to escalate in intensity and destructiveness. Training the church how to deal with the symptoms is no longer adequate. Preaching “feel-good” sermons on all of the good that is occurring in the church is no longer adequate. Denying that a problem exists is condescending and demoralizing. It is time to admit that there is a serious problem in the United Methodist Church and major changes need to be made at all levels of leadership, structures, and ministry. The church can be saved but only if pride can be sacrificed and genuine humility fanned into flame in the hearts of every single member. This is a church problem.

#### Polarization:

The problem for the United Methodist Church is polarization; and, for the purpose of this thesis, will be defined as an increasingly sharp division of opposing views. An emphasis should be placed on the word *increasingly* in order to note that polarization is, by nature, a continual process as well as an escalating concern for the church. Further, polarization is the byproduct of conflicting values which implies that, unless each member or participant of an

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<sup>16</sup> Edward L. Tullis, “The Heart of Evangelism.” Lifeline: Sharing Christ in a Broken World, Eds. Steve Beard and Maggie Schroeder. (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2003) 32.

organization holds every single core value in common, there will always be a natural inclination to polarize. The innate motivation is for community, fellowship, or unity.

Although the tendency is to continue focusing on the symptoms of the problem, special attention must be given to the problem itself. In order to do this, the primary focus must be shifted from the symptom itself to the root of the symptom. That is where the cause can be identified. An example may be the alcoholic who has gone through most of his or her life believing alcohol was the main problem until the day that person realizes that alcohol has been serving medicinal purposes for him or her by numbing that person to feelings or thoughts about or towards an abusive parent or spouse, etc. In similar fashion, the church can best identify its problem by looking at the causes or root of those symptoms.

The United Methodist Church is quite symptomatic, and to look at each and every symptom may seem to be an overwhelming task. However, it will be discovered that most, if not all, of the issues facing the church today all point in the same direction- to polarization; specifically, political and social polarization. Typically, polarization is a term reserved for the world of political science, and that is precisely the point. Politics are having a seriously negative effect upon the church. In many ways, the church has symbolically surrendered its credentials as the body of Christ in lieu of obtaining status as a progressively spiritual civic-minded social group. Polarization has become a church struggle over the role of politics and special interests, all the while abandoning what the church is supposed to be about in the first place, saving souls.

Therefore, polarization must be seen as it really is...a cancer that has been eating away at the foundation and heart of United Methodism for nearly 230 years. It is a disease that has been weakening the church's witness, consuming its resources, distracting the leadership from its mission, and stealing the faith of its members. It is my thesis that polarization is the primary factor leading the United Methodist Church to a state of crisis with very little hope of reversing the course. It is time to remember that ministry is not about us. It never has been and never will be. It has always been about the Father. In humility, may the church return to being the church instead of just another civic organization.

Long before polarization can come to life, there must be a set of core values intrinsically woven into the hearts of each member or participant. These values are typically developed over the span of a person's life and can be planted into one's heart by his or her parents, influential leaders, teachers, authors, or personal experiences. They define the person and shape one's character. Only in the case of a drastic event or life-changing experience will core values be altered or new values obtained. Obviously, a deeply religious experience, the loss of a family member, or some other significant event would suffice in this regard. Once obtained or developed, core values become non-negotiable passions that rage within the soul like an all-consuming fire. They can not be compromised at the risk of losing self. Core values *become* the person who holds them as sacred.

Over 200 years ago, John Wesley laid the foundation for a religious movement in the new world that encapsulated a particular set of values. Having



been raised in a deeply committed Christian family, Wesley did possess typical values of his upbringing, including sacramental theology, ecclesiology, devotion to family, and a deep commitment to the catholicity of the church.<sup>17</sup> However, Wesley also lived a life in conflict with his church. Feeling that the church had become complacent and negligent in its ministry to the poor, Wesley became a major advocate for the oppressed, the imprisoned, and the outcasts.<sup>18</sup> He valued every human life and dedicated his life towards ministering to their needs. To do this required some involvement on his behalf politically, so Wesley had to establish, for himself, adequate boundaries by which he could protect his spiritual vitality, while also influencing the political processes of his day.

A foundational component of Wesley's theology was not obtained until after his infamous Aldersgate experience. It was at Aldersgate, while listening to a reading of Martin Luther's *Commentary on Romans*, that he felt his heart strangely warmed. For perhaps the first time in his life, Wesley experienced genuine joy and confidence in his salvation. In a letter to his brother, Samuel, he writes, "By a Christian I mean one who so believes in Christ as that sin hath no more dominion over him; and in this obvious sense of the word I was not a Christian till May the 24<sup>th</sup> last past."<sup>19</sup> Following this experience, Wesley added to his list of core values: spiritual renewal, holiness, and an escalating hunger to bring salvation to those living in spiritual darkness. It is interesting to note that

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<sup>17</sup> John Wesley, Wesley's Doctrinal Standards: The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes, (Salem: Schmuel Publishing Co., Inc., 1988) Sermon 39, 390-399.

<sup>18</sup> Manfred Marquadt, John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 22.

<sup>19</sup> Frederick A. Norwood, The Story of American Methodism, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974) 27.

John and Charles Wesley were both serving as ordained clergy and preachers of the faith long before their conversion experiences! The establishment of what would become his core values was not finalized until after his encounter with the Christ.

Since the days of John Wesley, Methodism has endured many tests at the hands of revivalism, church splits, slavery, the Great Depression, Women's Suffrage, and the Civil Rights movement, just to name a few. Such incredible events and trials have had major effects on the church's core values; not to mention that with every church split, there comes the loss of certain core values, and with every church merger, has come the addition of certain core values. This means that if core values define who we are, what we stand for, and where we need to focus our ministries, then clearly Methodism has always been a church with an ecclesial form of schizophrenia. In fact, simply defining the core values of Methodism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be a major theological study! Two pertinent questions to ask then are as follows. Has this juggling of values been good for the church? Anytime two parties come together under the pretense of merger, doesn't the weaker of the two parties *lose* or *sacrifice* part of their identity for the good of the merger? That was certainly the fear of the early evangelicals prior to both mergers in 1946 and 1968.

Prior to 1968, the two most prominent strands of Methodism, the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Episcopal Churches, found themselves meandering through history on separate paths which served to create and develop an individual system of foundational core values. In the

course of their meandering and as reflected in numerous pre-merger documents, it can be ascertained that very little time and attention was given to the identifying of each church's core values. The conversation concerning these vital and fundamental values should not have been overlooked. Regardless, their discovery and implementation were pushed aside in light of competing agenda. As written by Frederick Norwood, "There was a further problem...not even faced in the negotiating sessions: theological distinctives. That became an immediate problem only after unification, when the United Methodist Church belatedly began to ask itself what were its doctrinal standards."<sup>20</sup> Clearly, doctrine was a subordinate value during the days preceding merger, indicating that, even before the marriage in 1968, major foundational cracks could have been discovered if given ample time for assessment. However, the value of unity led the day and prevailed, providing 20<sup>th</sup> century Methodism with a new priority- ecumenism. But what were the core values of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Episcopal Churches?

- Evangelical United Brethren (EUB)

Long before the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren Church merged in 1946, great strides were being made in the call to ecumenism. As early as 1881, worldwide ecumenism was beginning to develop a conviction in the minds of Methodists all over the country. In response to this conviction, the Evangelicals began to prayerfully evaluate their own denominational relationships, and in response to their findings, a series of Ecumenical Methodist Conferences began to take place involving most of the Methodist bodies or

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 427-428.

splinter groups. Although there was very little discussion among Methodists as to the possibilities of merging, “Evangelicals and United Brethren participated in the major steps toward the World Council of Churches...the Evangelical Church was the first American denomination to join the body.”<sup>21</sup>

Considered to be conservative biblically and politically, the two bodies struggled in their stance towards the liberalism of the world. With a strong emphasis on the central authority of the bible and an unashamedly commitment to the doctrine of sanctification, they were often times called “radicals” by the rest of the world. The United Brethren were also very committed to missionary work, Christian education, and evangelism. Within a few short years, the Women’s Missionary Association was formed and, in turn, was responsible for the building of several clinics, hospitals, and schools.<sup>22</sup> However, perhaps the church’s greatest achievement was the creation of the Rural Life Commission which was designed to assist those farmers hit hardest by the depression.

Embracing the culture of that day, the two churches spent a lot of time, energy, and financial resources towards establishing ways to generate ongoing support for the rural churches and their ministers. While possessing a deep love and appreciation of their rural churches, they came to realize the burden that non-seminary trained clergy put on them. In response, they began to focus more intentionally on programs that would assist adequate training of clergy, provide financial assistance, and, strengthen the ordination process. This value of clergy effectiveness would remain foundational for the church because it believed every

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 357-358.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 418.

church, urban and rural, deserved access to the sacraments and to the best trained ministers available. The two churches also valued the rejection of secret societies, temperance, strong Episcopal leadership, and an ongoing commitment to bettering race relations.

- Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC)

In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, and Methodist Protestant Churches merged to form the Methodist Church. Typically considered the more liberal of the strands, its primary value involved a diminished role of the bishop. Believing the position of bishop should be filled democratically and not as a reward for pastoral excellence, the churches stressed a lesser role from their leaders in regards to their own itinerancy, the appointment process (also deemed democratic), and their leadership during annual conference. In regards to the appointment process, many of the members saw frequent changing of appointments as potentially “disruptive” to a churches long-range planning.<sup>23</sup>

The church also valued ministry to youth and college students. Understanding the potential that young people possessed, The Epworth league was established in 1889, and in 1913 the very first Wesley Foundation was established at the University of Illinois. One of the earliest youth gatherings in Memphis (1926) resulted in nearly four thousand youth delegates coming together to demand efforts for unification of the Methodist denominations.<sup>24</sup> Their maturity and commitment truly increased their value within the church. The

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 364.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 365.

church began to invest more into the lives of the youth, having a direct influence on the number of potential candidates for ordained ministry.

Other values of the Methodists include the role and status of women and the concern for missionary work, both foreign and domestic. Perhaps taking a lesson from John Wesley, the Methodists did not think it was adequate merely to send financial resources to where the needs were, but felt it necessary to go and see the needs with their own eyes first, in order to add a passionate aspect to their fundraising for missions.<sup>25</sup> Much of the mission work was headed by the Woman's Foreign Missionary Societies in each of the three denominations. Appalachian service projects were undertaken, as well as the establishment of hospitals and colleges. Missions' guilds began to spring up all over the country as more and more women stepped up into Christian service and leadership.

For the Methodist Church South, the role of bishop was highly esteemed, conflicting with the North church's stance and becoming a sticking point in pre-merger conversations. Equally contested was the role of bishops in making appointments. Southern bishops did not like the idea of ministers serving longer than four years in any one place, stressing the designation as an "itinerant church." The general attitude among bishops indicated a stronger emphasis on the democratic processes utilized in conference proceedings. Episcopal power was further diminished by the establishing of the Judicial Council in 1934, which took away the bishop's responsibility to designate the books for the course of study.

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<sup>25</sup> Manfred Marquardt, John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 30.

### Core Values and Polarization:

The ecumenical push in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century succeeded in bringing back together three strands of Methodism that had previously served in contrast and competition to each other. Their re-marriage introduces the assumption that the core values that previously led to their divorce 100 years prior were no longer esteemed. Yet, evidence speaks to the contrary. The 1939 merger was founded on just a few mutually shared values. These included a missionary zeal, a spirit of catholicity, and an embrace of Methodism's history and structures. However, the three churches did not share the values of biblical authority, evangelism, and doctrinal standards; this implies that the three denominations may have been unequally yoked as early as 1939.

For the Evangelical United Brethren, a similar assessment can be made, but on a lighter scale. The two churches were obviously similar in their passion for ecumenism, the authority of scripture, and the need to get the evangelistic message into the hands of as many people as possible. Therefore, in areas of missions, evangelism, and scripture, the 1946 marriage was a blessed event. However, the two churches did not agree in regards to the role of bishops and in the matters of appointment making. Overall, this merger did not have the makings of disaster.

In the United Methodist Church, the problem of polarization began to reveal itself as early as 1965, just three years prior to merger. It was during the pre-merger conversations that the theological and spiritual polarities began to manifest themselves. What brought the two Methodist bodies together in the first

place was the desire for Christian unity in light of the growing catholic spirit of this nation. Following the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, this nation was polarizing all on its own. There was a need for Christian unity, and it was a matter of great witness for the United Methodist Church to display that spirit of ecumenism in its own way. Unity was the prevailing value of the day.

The problem was that adequate attention had not been given to the discovery of other prominent values. Speculation would lead one to assume that, in the absence of such an important conversation, there must have been a mutually shared understanding that the doctrines of the United Methodist Church would be best served by a spirit of pluralism. Although a Presbyterian, Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., affirms this notion with the following comments.

Openness, tolerance, inclusiveness, acceptance of diversity-these have been characteristics of the mainline churches ever since the twenties, when the Scopes Monkey Trial passed into history and fundamentalism lost its bid for mainline control...[these characteristics] characterize the modern, secular-scientific world view out of which our mainline churches operate. They are the basis of the ecumenical movement, long a major preoccupation of mainline Protestantism, which hopes one day to establish an inclusive, tolerant, diverse, accepting, ecumenical church.<sup>26</sup>

It can be argued that the United Methodist Church was formed with a strong vision for theological pluralism. Yet, several intrinsic core values still remained at both extremes of the theological spectrum. As alluded to earlier, just because core values are not discussed does not mean they do not exist, and just because they are subdued for a season does not mean they are irrelevant.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., Mainline Churches and the Evangelicals: A Challenging Crisis? (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981) 21.



History has proven that core values *a/ways* have a way of making themselves known. They are behind every argument, every merger, and certainly, every schism.

The merger of 1968 represented more than just the coming together of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Episcopal Churches. It also represented the coming together of two dominant theological polarities referred to as the liberal progressive polarity and the conservative evangelical polarity. Both groups are to be seen as minorities within the body of the United Methodist Church, but they are also very vocal and very prominent in their influence on the rest of the denomination. Although the church today prides itself on its ability to minister to the majority in the middle, both polarities serve to give the middle its doctrinal standards and its spiritual leaders. Even if these two political opposites did not exist within the church; the issues in which Methodism struggles today certainly would.

#### Additional Concerns:

Understanding that polarization is naturally divisive and destructive, it should be noted that it is also a normal way of life. This means that it can be seen as both negative and positive to the life of the church. Due to the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, the church is a living organism. When it grows, we consider it healthy. When it shrivels and declines, we consider it diseased. Polarization is a natural progression, and anytime two or more [people] gather over a period of time for any particular purpose, we can assume that differences in opinions and values will also manifest. Methodism is a potpourri of economic,

social, and cultural diversity. Naturally, its core values will be equally as diverse. It is this positive sign of health perspective that has brought many theologians and idealists to embrace the ideology of pluralism.

Theological pluralism is based on the premise that there really is more than one truth in this world and each truth should be embraced as contributing something significant to the whole. As quoted by Jerry L. Walls, Bishop Emerson Colaw writes,

It was felt that because of the tremendous variety of beliefs among United Methodists, we needed a new doctrinal statement. It was quickly decided that we could not develop a creed to which all in our church must give adherence...we decided that doctrine could not be a legalistic nor juridical standard for excommunication or censure. All we could do was speak with assurance of emphases and directions which we hold in common and then let each board, each person, hammer out his own understanding of his faith and task.<sup>27</sup>

Writing as a representative of the Theological Commission on Doctrine, Bishop Colaw's words reflected a need for the denomination to accommodate the rising tension between doctrinal beliefs and polarities. Granted, pluralism was first adopted as official policy by the United Methodist Church in 1972; the decision served to lead Methodism's philosophy of doctrinal plurality up to its reform in 1986.

At this juncture, it would be speculative to suggest that the quickly declining membership of the fledgling church may have provoked such openness to pluralistic doctrines, yet few could deny the rise in tension that it created among Methodist clergy and laity alike. Although it is quite possible that

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<sup>27</sup> Jerry L. Walls, The Problem of Pluralism: Recovering United Methodist Identity, (Wilmore: Baker Books, 1988) 13.

theological pluralism was a response to the fear generated by the rapidly eroding membership, it is unlikely that pluralism could have been so cleverly devised and orchestrated. For many, pluralism was seen as a natural progression. Yet, there were others who felt as if the foundational core values of the Christian faith were coming under assault. Still others saw the open doors of pluralism as an opportunity to throw out a wider net evangelistically. Regardless, it is obvious that the commission's decision to soften the church's views on doctrinal distinctives has been a major contributor to the problem of polarization.

Setting:

The problems associated with polarization are not unique to the United Methodist Church but to most of American Protestantism. For it is among most of our nation's mainline denominations that issues involving political correctness and social action arise. Although the reasons for this phenomenon may appear lost among Christian conversations, the effects of polarization cannot be dismissed. Simply stated the church has failed to insulate itself from the enculturation of society and, as a result, stands in confusion as to its response. Much like the two party political system of our nation, mainline churches also find themselves divided politically, socially, and even spiritually. Sociology's sect-to-church theory claims that, "Orthodox religious groups in a secular environment will gradually and inevitably become more like their environment. Once secularized, they do not again become orthodox."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Michael S. Hamilton and Jennifer McKinney, "Turning the Mainline Around," Eds. James V. Heidinger II and Steve Beard. Streams of Renewal: Welcoming New Life Into United Methodism, (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2004) 13-14.

However, the focus of this thesis is directed towards the United Methodist Church since it is here that I call home. Having served as a pastor in this denomination for nearly 13 years, it is Methodism that I love and the context in which I serve the Lord. Yet, it is the Methodism of John Wesley, Thomas Coke, and Francis Asbury that has attracted me and held me in its grips and not the Methodism of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The majority of my pastoral experience came while serving rural churches in Eastern Kentucky, with the rest of my experience taking place in more urban settings. Of the 13 years of ministry service to the United Methodist Church, my time has been almost equally split between two separate annual conferences in separate jurisdictions of the denomination. It is throughout this ministry experience that I have realized the vast differences between Methodism across conference and certainly jurisdictional boundaries.

Therefore, the setting for this thesis takes place across these geographical and political boundaries. The symptomatic problems that the church faces today are shared only because of the connectional commitments of all United Methodists. It cannot be concluded that because the denomination is losing thousands of members each year that each and every jurisdiction or annual conference is losing members every year. In fact, recent studies have revealed that most of the annual conferences in the Southeast Jurisdiction are growing. Nor can it be concluded that issues of homosexuality and evangelism are being handled similarly. The symptoms are different. Yet, the problem is the same. Polarization is slowly dividing the church, making the boundaries wider each day.

The setting of this thesis also includes an explosion throughout this nation of new, vibrant, non-denominational churches. Americans are losing faith in mainline denominations. They are tired of the divisions and competition. They are tired of seeing their tithe spent in support of denominational issues that stand in conflict to their values. They are tired of the wimpy Christianity that “compromises or soft sells our sinful nature to expand organizational turf.”<sup>29</sup> They are tired of denominational leadership that refuses to admit the problem is too big for them to handle alone. Jim Collins, a secular author in the world of business, calls this the *Stockdale paradox*, “You can never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end- which you can never afford to lose- with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.”<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, the setting for this thesis takes place in my own heart. Having served 13 years in this denomination, I, too, am discouraged by what I see. I am tired of seeing my churches pay outrageous apportionment bills only to hear later that the money was used in ways that conflicts with my own values. I am tired of the direction of our annual conference in regards to issues that stand in conflict with my own values. And, I am exhausted with the prevailing attitude that the connectional system is more important than the local churches. I honestly do not know if I am called to remain a United Methodist, or to leave for another church. This topic was selected to assist me in the decision making process.

There is a problem within United Methodism called polarization, and I am saddened that the church has allowed the political culture of our day to have full

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<sup>29</sup> George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Walls of the Sanctuary*, (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2005) 14.

<sup>30</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, (New York: Harper Business, 2001) 85.

reign over our denomination. We have lost our first love, and the only way to get it back is through humbly seeking the Lord's face in prayer. I do believe the church can be saved; however, I don't expect to see it happen. This is the setting...

## Chapter Two

### Theological Framework

Polarization is more than a mere problem concerning theological diversity in an increasingly complex world; it is also a problem of contrasting ecclesiologies. Constructed spiritually and ideologically upon the values of each member therein, the collective ministry goals of any two churches will never follow, nor should they, the same two paths. Naturally, as the church becomes increasingly polarized theologically, it will also become increasingly distinctive in its ministry focus and in the implementation of its values. As Aubrey Malphurs writes, “Values are responsible for diversity; they determine ministry distinctive.”<sup>31</sup>

Based upon the teachings of the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), Rick Warren teaches that there are five purposes that the church should concern itself with: discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, ministry, and worship.<sup>32</sup> For purposes of clarity and fairness, four of Warren’s five purposes will be used as an outline for the discovery and the evaluation of each polarity’s core values; discipleship, evangelism, missions, and worship. The reason fellowship will not be included is due to the all inclusive nature of fellowship within the realm of each of the other four categories. In addition, a fifth purpose, connectional relations, will also be added in order to give ample attention to each polarity’s role within the denomination. It should be

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<sup>31</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, Values Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) 14.

<sup>32</sup> Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) 102-106.

noted that throughout this thesis, all biblical citations will be taken from the New International Version (NIV) of the *Holy Bible*.

### Discipleship:

Before the topic of discipleship can be adequately addressed, a very poignant question must first be asked. Why bother with discipleship? Moses writes in the Book of Deuteronomy, “these are the commands, decrees, and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe...so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord...so that you may enjoy long life” (Deut. 6:1-3). Several years later, a cycle of sin emerges in the Book of Judges, illustrating what could happen if such teaching were to be neglected. On six separate occasions, the people of Israel failed to maintain a ritual of discipleship; and each time, devastating effects riddled the nation (Judg. 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). The steps to the cycle include sin, slavery, supplication, salvation, solitude, and then back again to sin. The sin was idolatry and was the result of neglecting to teach children the knowledge of who God is. Oddly enough, the people of God were more likely to forsake discipleship during periods of solitude as a nation. The Bible says it this way, “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who neither knew the Lord nor what he had done for Israel”(Judg. 2:10). Without discipleship, people perish.

In the middle of his pastorate to the church of Israel, Moses asked the Lord a favor, “If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you” (Ex. 33:13). Simply put, discipleship is the method by which God’s children



learn about God. It involves a commitment on behalf of the student (Ps. 32:8) as well as a life of integrity on behalf of the teacher (I Tim. 6:3; Tit. 2:7).

Discipleship is a teaching that begins and ends with God. It is a teaching that must be pursued in a spirit of humility and spiritual hunger. It is at that time that the Holy Spirit comes and gives revelation as to the meaning and application of God's Word. While addressing *his* disciples, Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23) and a few verses later he adds, "...the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (John 14:26).

Jesus taught his disciples for three years preceding his death and resurrection. He taught them about spiritual disciplines (Matt. 5:45; 6:5-16; 9:1-13; Luke 6:28; 22:40), kingdom living (Matt. 5-7; 18:1-9; 18:15-20; 22:15-22; 22:37-40), soteriology (Matt. 13:24-30; 16:1-4; 16:21-28; 22:1-14; 22:23-33; 24-25) social ethics (Matt. 8:1; 8:28-34; 9:1-8; 12:22-45; 13:24-30; 14:13-21; 15:1-11; 17:14-23; 20:29-34) and even meteorology (Matt. 8:23-27; 14:22-36). He taught them because he loved them and, ultimately, because he loved God. The purpose of his intentional discipleship was to prepare the disciples for the ministry that would follow his ascension into Heaven. Discipleship, when motivated by love, grounded in purpose, and saturated in prayer, moves people closer to God. However, if discipleship is used to discover someone or something other than God, then it cannot be true discipleship. This should explain why there are so many stern warnings throughout the New Testament in

regards to false prophets and to their false teachings (Matt. 7:15; 24:11; I Tim. 1:3; 6:3; Pet. 2:1).

From a Wesleyan perspective, discipleship has always been a foundational core value. Responsible for Methodism's quick expansion throughout its first century, discipleship was found in every society, class, and band. The task of discipleship was even protected by the society's chief rule: "Their first care is to set Schools for the Poor, wherein Children (or if need be, Adult Persons) may be instructed in the Fundamentals of Christianity by men of known and approv'd Piety."<sup>33</sup>

Wesley believed that a commitment to discipleship was a non-negotiable follow-up to one's conversion. He also believed *if* a loving atmosphere could be created within the life of a small group that, "biblical descriptions of what *should* happen in the church would spring to life."<sup>34</sup> It is apparent through John Wesley's sermons, notes, and journal entries, that nothing was more important to him in regards to the process of discipleship, than the written Word of God. He frequently referred to himself as *homo unius libri*- "a man of one book."<sup>35</sup> Throughout the history of Methodism, there has been a deliberate commitment of, and devotion to, the study and teaching of Scripture. As laid out in the *Discipline*, "United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace. We

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<sup>33</sup> Howard A. Snyder, The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980) 15.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> Ben Witherington III, "The Study of Scripture in Early Methodism," How United Methodists Study Scripture, Ed. Gayle C. Felton (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 40.

are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst whom we trust in life and death.”<sup>36</sup>

So, why should Methodists bother with discipleship? Both biblical history and church history reveal that discipleship must be taught (1) because it is the method by which people learn about God and His Son, Jesus Christ. Without discipleship, people perish. (2) Discipleship must occur because it is the only appropriate response to the saving grace of God that has been given so generously and freely to us. Once Jesus has taken control of our hearts and lives, then life is no longer ours to live. Discipleship becomes the vehicle by which holiness may be obtained. This is another core value of historic Methodism. We are commanded to love God above all else, neighbor second, and self last. Finally, (3) discipleship must occur in order to prevent “another generation growing up, who know neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10). We live in a dying world, and the only hope we [world] have is Jesus Christ, “who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

The second question that must precede the discussion on values asks, “What should Methodists teach?” Again, the words of Jesus in the Great Commission should serve to adequately answer this question, “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Before proceeding, we must ask, “What *are* the things that Jesus has commanded?” The question leads us to just one passage, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34).

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<sup>36</sup> Harriett Jane Olson, ed. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004) 78.

What this reveals to the church is that love of neighbor is a non-negotiating aspect of Christian living. It is a value that is traditionally held by both conservatives and liberals alike.

However, there is one aspect of Jesus' commandment that is often times overlooked or lost in translation. Love is more than a one-directional deposit of affection. Love is sacrificial commitment and concern for the well-being of others over and beyond love for self. Since love involves the care of others, it must be naturally concluded that love must also contain an element of discipline, correction, and an occasional rebuke. Discipline is not about judging, but about lovingly pruning each other's lives in a way that enables spiritual growth. Jesus did not say "do not judge"; he said "do not judge or *you too* will be judged" (Matt. 7:1). Discipline is an issue for community. It involves love and mutual commitment to the spiritual well-being of one another. Paul writes, "Our Fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

In answer to the previous question, Methodist discipleship must teach the love of God as has been manifest through the life, teachings, death, and, resurrection of Jesus Christ. Secondly, discipleship must teach how to love one another sacrificially. Thirdly, discipleship must contain an element of discipline so that, in due time, each member will be able to produce "much" fruit for the kingdom of God. Discipline, while never flattering, is requisite to spiritual growth and must be embraced by both disciple and mentor. Lastly, discipleship must put God at the center of every teaching because, without God, the teaching

simply cannot be called discipleship. That is only possible through humble prayer and the opening of hearts to the message of God as revealed through His Spirit.

Obviously, conflicting values do exist in regards to discipleship. Methodist conservatives are found to place high values on the authority of scripture, Divine revelation, and personal holiness. Fundamental to understanding the conservative value of scripture is the notion that conservatives are seemingly content to allow scripture to set their political and missional agenda for them, both corporately and individually. This can only happen when believers have sacrificed their own agendas with hopes of embracing what they believe to be the agenda of God. This willingness to sacrifice self is usually in response to what God has already done in their lives spiritually and emotionally. For some, the valuing of scripture has been imparted to them over a period of time from either godly parents or some other faithful witness. For others, valuing scripture is just a natural response to a personal experience with, or a desire to know, God.

For John Wesley, both scenarios were applicable- strict, godly parenting and a powerful conversion experience at Aldersgate. It was John's Wesley's mother, Suzanna, who developed the reputation for being a strong disciplinarian and a sound biblical instructor to her kids. In a letter to her son, she wrote, "I insist on conquering the wills of children betimes, because this is the only foundation for a religious education. When this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason of its parent, till its own understanding

comes to maturity.”<sup>37</sup> Wesley always possessed a love for the Holy Scriptures and much of his day was devoted to its reading. In fact, it was while studying his Bible, along with a Commentary on Romans written by Martin Luther that led him to his Aldersgate Experience. In the words of Paul, “To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil.1:21).

The principle behind this core value is that, due to the sinfulness of the human heart, there is a natural tendency to force scripture to support an already existing agenda in the heart of the reader. Therefore, one must die daily to self so that God’s agenda may be made manifest through the scriptures. This also requires discernment of the Holy Spirit’s presence, instruction, and application. Knight and Saliers write, “Discernment has to do with being attuned to what the Spirit inspires and illuminates in light of the spiritual and social concerns of gravity...”<sup>38</sup>

For the most part, conservatives are not heavily influenced by rationalism or modernity. Scripture has already become part of who they are in Christ and, as a result, they see biblical inadequacies and imperfections as opportunities to learn something new about God instead of a stumbling block to their faith. They also understand that one of Satan’s schemes in disengaging believers from Christ is by attacking their faith, and biblical foundation. Pastor Rob Renfro, of *GoodNews* magazine, writes:

We believe they [scriptures] are God’s witness to us. That means if the Bible contains it, it’s not our job to correct it. If the Bible

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth J. Collins, A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 12.

<sup>38</sup> Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers, The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 28.

teaches it, it's not our prerogative to twist it. And if the Bible states it clearly and consistently, we don't need the latest copy of *Psychology Today*, or this morning's Gallup Poll or some pontificator of political properness to tell us why the Bible got it wrong and what enlightened folk, today's Gnostics, know to be true.<sup>39</sup>

Maxie Dunnam says it this way, "The Bible is more than a book. It is the revelation and an encounter with the living God. It is an invitation to salvation and eternal life, and it is a blueprint for living."<sup>40</sup>

Equally significant to conservatives, is the value of Divine revelation in regards to the study of scripture, preaching, and teaching. Paul wrote to the church of Galatia, "I want you to know, brothers that, the gospel I preached is not something man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:11-12). What is found consistent among conservatives is the view that God has revealed Himself, both through the content and the writing of the Holy Scriptures. Since revelation is not bound by time, both must be studied for purposes of contextual and historical settings, and must be studied in relation to one another. John Wesley understood that, without Divine revelation, he would have been lost in the Bible's interpretation:

In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end, to find a way to heaven...I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things to spiritual'...if any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Rob Renfroe, "An Appeal to Leadership: Listen & Lead," *Good News* Nov. 2006: 19.

<sup>40</sup> Maxie D. Dunnam, "Scripture, Authority, and Power," Eds. James V. Heidinger II and Steve Beard *Streams of Renewal: Welcoming New Life into United Methodism*, (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2004) 175.

<sup>41</sup> James V. Heidinger II, "John Wesley and United Methodist Renewal," *GoodNews* May/June 2006: 19.

It is widely accepted among *most* conservatives that both Old and New Testaments are equally requisite to understanding the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. From the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden to the purification rituals throughout Leviticus and on to the prophetic words of Isaiah, the general consensus is that *all* of Scripture bears witness to the life of Christ Jesus. As Joel B. Green writes, “the Old and New Testaments are inseparable in their witness to God the Savior and affirms that the coming of Christ is the point of orientation that gives all biblical books their meaning as Scripture.”<sup>42</sup>

Finally, conservatives are also found to highly value the doctrine of holiness or entire sanctification. John Wesley, contrary to the teaching and influence of his Moravian brothers, believed God had raised up the [Methodist] movement in order to promote holiness in every sphere of life, both corporately, and individually. In the words of Stephen Seamands, “Holiness was Methodism’s driving force and burning focus, the hub that held all the spokes of the wheel of the movement together.”<sup>43</sup> Methodist history is laced with evidence that all points to the doctrine of holiness as being the fuel that sparked the church’s quick growth throughout the nineteenth century.

Conservatives, like John Wesley, believe that, without holiness of heart, one cannot enter the gates of Heaven (Heb. 12:14); because, “God is holy” (Lev. 11:44; Isa. 6:3; Ez. 28:25; 2 Cor. 7:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Holiness, as defined by Wesley, reflected one who loved the Lord “with all your heart, and with

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<sup>42</sup> Joel B. Green, “Scripture in the Church.” The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal, Ed. Paul W. Chilcote (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 50.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen A. Seamands, “Submitting To Be More Vile.” The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal, Ed. Paul W. Chilcote (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 124.



all your soul, and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5; 13:3; 30:6; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27). However, the problem is that even after salvation, sin continues to wreak havoc on the heart of the believer. As was with justification, the believer once again stands in need of God’s grace. Sanctifying grace is that grace which enables the believer to be made perfect in love and is a process that occurs over the duration of one’s lifetime. The point is that the redemptive act of justification is the provocation of sanctification; an element of spirituality requisite for eternal heavenly dwelling. When genuine conversion is missing, sanctification cannot occur.

Therefore, the teaching and preaching of holiness is a non-negotiable core value for the conservative believer; and, to achieve this perfection of heart, one must approach God with total devotion and commitment to His ways and truths. Unfortunately, there are too many Christians like the rich, young, ruler, who, although they desire to obtain eternal life, are not willing to pay the cost (Luke 18:18-23). Holiness implicitly involves discipline, sacrifice, and humility. Over the past 30 to 40 years, the United Methodist Church has grown complacent in such matters and is now facing the consequences of such neglected teaching. Holiness preaching has become a thing of the past. Discipline within the realm of discipleship is fleeting. Holiness has become this “thing” that no one can achieve, so why bother? Without holiness, the United Methodist Church will not see God.

Discipleship among liberals, takes on an entirely different meaning and purpose. While treasuring such values as relativism, ecumenism, and social

holiness, it is believed among liberals that discipleship must incorporate aspects of disproving scripture, the implementation of social disciplines, and ecclesial disobedience. While liberals *claim* to value a “softer” authority of scripture than do conservatives, reality shows that scripture may not be a core value at all.

Rev. Tom Griffith, a reconciling pastor writes,

Although the creeds of our denomination pay lip service to the idea that scripture is ‘authoritative’ and ‘sufficient for faith and practice,’ many of us have moved far beyond that notion in our own theological thinking. We are only deceiving ourselves-and lying to our evangelical brothers and sisters-when we deny the shift we have made...We have moved far beyond the idea that the Bible is exclusively normative and literally authoritative for our faith. To my thinking, that is good! What is bad is that we have tried to con ourselves and others by saying, ‘we haven’t changed our position.’<sup>44</sup>

Core to the liberal teaching of scripture is the notion that the Bible is filled with errors and contextually outdated. While embracing the teachings of biblical criticism, classic liberalism believes Scripture to be a supplemental tool for both world history and ethics. Knight and Saliers write, “Scripture itself is a primary source of Christian teaching, yet it contains tensions and even apparent contradictions in what is taught about questions of justice, judgment, and God’s will.”<sup>45</sup> Due to the textual inconsistencies, outdated teachings, and unreliable manuscripts, biblical teaching is virtually irrelevant to today’s Christian. Victor Paul Furnish writes, “The claim that the Bible spells out God’s will once and for all contradicts Scripture itself, which attests that because God’s claim is as boundless as God’s grace, it can never be reduced to a static set of rules, laws,

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<sup>44</sup> Rob Renfroe, “An Appeal to Leadership: Listen & Lead,” Good News Nov/Dec 2006: 18.

<sup>45</sup> Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers, The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 23.

or teachings.”<sup>46</sup> And, J. Phillip Wogaman writes, ‘If the impression is left that a good Christian will accept everything in the Bible as factually true, then how is one to deal with the inconsistencies and the direct conflicts with well-known truths about the natural world?’<sup>47</sup> All indication seems to imply that, instead of valuing the authority or the divine aspects of Scripture, liberals only value those aspects of the Bible that serve their current needs.

A problem with this liberal form of biblical interpretation is that the foundation for authoritative teaching never generates a mandate for salvation or holy living. This creates a dilemma for church growth and spiritual development. If Scripture is not the guiding document for the establishing of moral conduct, ecclesial responsibilities, and authentic Christian living, then what document is viewed as authoritative? Without the Bible, what do liberal pastors preach? What do they teach? How do the church members get spiritually fed? The agenda followed is one of relativism, carefully pieced together by those parts of the Bible that most of their membership would consider to be non-threatening and non-judgmental. This results in very shallow discipleship. Wogaman writes that, the appropriate way to study the Bible is *not* to focus on each and every word, but to understand the “spirit”<sup>48</sup> in which the Bible was written. This methodology gives the interpreter freedom to pick and chose which *words* are actually important.

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<sup>46</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture,” The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality, Eds. Tex Sample and Amy E. Delong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 33.

<sup>47</sup> J. Phillip Wogaman, To Serve the Present Age: The Gift & Promise of United Methodism, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 49.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 52.

Relativism, the notion that there are *no* absolutes in the world is just one of liberalism's highly regarded values. This value comes particularly handy to the liberal when issues such as the inerrancy of Scripture enters the debate (2 Tim. 3:16); or, the existence of God (John 1:1-4). By holding on to relativism, the liberal church is more apt to embrace doctrinal or theological diversity. Since all doctrinal beliefs are based upon one's relative experiences, there are no sacred cows except that of inclusiveness. The goal is to obtain the largest audience possible for the purpose of indoctrination to love, grace, and happiness. As long as one does not embrace the idea that *his or her* path to God is the only way, he or she will find a home within liberalism. J. Phillip Wogaman writes, "The Holy Spirit cannot really be present unless there is a place at the table for everybody."<sup>49</sup>

Closely related to relativism, is the value of rationalism. While highly stressing the role of science or the intellect in regards to matters of faith, the liberal church has almost succeeded in eliminating the believer's need for faith at all; this is contrary to the teaching of Hebrews which reminds us that "faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). Iain H. Murray says, "Scripture teaches that faith in the gospel of Christ is indispensable for salvation; liberalism believes that men and women can have 'the Christian life' without the Christian faith."<sup>50</sup> This leaves the liberal church with the necessity to reinvent or redefine God in ways that match its own agenda. However, in order for that theology to seem plausible, liberals must succeed in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Iain H. Murray, The Unresolved Controversy: Unity With Non-Evangelicals, (Great Britain: Howie & Seath, 2001) 11-12.

deemphasizing or eliminating the church's foundational Wesleyan doctrines all together. What follows is a theology of universalism, giving salvation to everyone simply because they cannot perceive a loving God who also disciplines those he loves and judges those who reject Him. Therefore, liberalism believes that God is *still* in the process of creating and reorganizing what has already been created.<sup>51</sup> Knight and Saliers write, "Either God, through modern research and thinking, is providing new revelation that relativizes previous teaching, or basic teaching is necessarily modified as it is applied in new contexts."<sup>52</sup>

With relativism, rationalism, and universalism all serving as the bedrock for liberal discipleship; it presents no surprise that ecumenism has become the most revered of all core values. Recognizing that although differences in theology and mission still remain, the liberal theologian believes *all* Christians should be willing to sacrifice those differences in support of Jesus' only true value-ecumenism. Granted, Jesus, while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane on the eve of his death, did pray this prayer, "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one; I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:22-23).

Unity is a value embraced by both liberals and conservatives alike; however, unity is not a core value esteemed by conservatives on the same level as evangelism, biblical integrity, or, Christian perfection. Although very important

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<sup>51</sup> E. Dale Dunlap, "Homosexuality and the Social Principles," The Loyal Opposition: Struggling With the Church on Homosexuality, Eds. Tex Sample and Amy E. Delong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 78.

<sup>52</sup> Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers, The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 51.

to conservatives, the priority of unity falls far behind the basic Christian tenet of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Iain H. Murray adds, "The starting point of the ecumenical movement is that all who say they are Christians, on a minimum profession of faith, are to be accepted as such."<sup>53</sup> Naturally, the liberal polarity within Methodism is extremely irritated when the rest of the denomination cannot resolve this issue.

It is the collection of these core values which provides liberal Methodism with its much needed rallying point for another value, social holiness. As already discussed, the liberal polarity believes nothing is more important than the grace of God saturated with love in every facet of its implementation. Therefore, while following the teaching of Jesus, the focus group of such ministry is to include all people, regardless of nationality (Matt. 8:5-13; 15:21-28; John 4:1-26), physical condition (Matt. 8:28-34; 20:29-34; John 5:1-15; 9:1-12), mental condition (Matt. 14:13-21; 17:14-23), age (Matt. 18:1-9; 19:13-15), sex (John 4:1-26; 12:1-11), police record (Luke 23:39-41), and political distinction (Matt. 16:5-12; John 3:1-21; 4:43-54), just to name a few. Liberals love people! In response to the love shown them, liberals want everyone to know the grace that *they* have experienced.

In order to reach people of diverse groups, circumstances, nationalities, and walks of life, liberals know they must become active in both the political and ecclesiastical worlds. They are committed to understanding the systems which lead people to oppression, including church systems, and they are committed to

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<sup>53</sup> Iain H. Murray, The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-Evangelicals, (Great Britain: Howie & Seath, 2001) 12.

doing whatever it takes to get the message of God's love into the hearts of people, even if that includes alienating them from their denomination. That is why the liberal polarity of the church is so defiant in regards to the hot issues, like homosexuality. While deliberately going against the church's doctrines, teachings, and disciplines- the liberal agenda is developing a spirit of rebellion and disobedience. Their true core values are then revealed. Church polity and doctrine must take a back seat while human rights issues are at the forefront. Joretta L. Marshall writes, "Rules and legal systems-even those of the church-sometimes must be challenged, and perhaps, disobeyed. Initially, we do not know the cost of such prophetic witness, just as we do not know the rewards that might eventuate from these endeavors."<sup>54</sup>

Interestingly, while rallying around ecumenism and unity, the liberal church continues to endorse those within the system who choose to disobey the church's doctrines and teachings. Rebels are treated like heroes. However, in regards to conservatives, liberals continue to demand compliance and "connectionalism." Bishop Willimon writes, "Loyalty to the system at large, relationships with ministerial peers, an ability to 'deliver' apportionments, [and] a basic unwillingness to rock the ark, [is] more valued by cabinets and bishops making appointments than a clear assessment of that pastor's ability to help the local church accomplish its mission."<sup>55</sup> It is becoming the assumption that, as long as the denomination's liberal party is in control of both systems and structures,

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<sup>54</sup> Joretta L. Marshall, "Ecclesial Disobedience as a Spiritual Discipline." The Loyal Opposition: Struggling With the Church on Homosexuality, Eds. Tex Sample and Amy E. Delong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 160.

<sup>55</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon. A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 42.

the only unaccepted form of disobedience is found in the conservative who does not embrace ecumenism!

### Evangelism:

Another part of the Great Commission, apart from the call to discipleship, is the call to evangelism. Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15) and Methodists everywhere have learned that, when he sends, he also equips (Heb. 13:21; 2 Tim. 3:17) with power and authority (Luke 9:1-9; 2 Tim. 3:17). Evangelism is defined as, “The faithful proclamation in word and deed of the saving power of God in Christ Jesus.”<sup>56</sup> It is a faithful response to what God has done in one’s life. It is not a burden, but a joy and a privilege, to be able to share with another human being what God has done.

The theological underpinnings of evangelism can be found in the actions of God in creation. Man and woman were created in the image of God for purposes of fellowship, worship, and loving reciprocity. Yet, in order for true love to flourish, God had to give Adam and Eve an option to Himself. Over time, the two grew impatient with God and, in an expression of their freewill, rejected God-worship in return for self-worship. They gave in to the serpent’s lies and temptation, embracing the idea of equality with God and, as a result, lost the relationship that God had intended for them. Sin, this time in the form of idolatry, separated them from the love of God in the same way that it separates each one of us (Rom. 3:23). However, God had a plan in the form of His one and only

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<sup>56</sup> Edward L. Tullis, “The Heart of Evangelism.” Lifeline: Sharing Christ in a Broken World, Eds. Steve Beard and Maggie Schroeder (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2003) 33.



Son, Jesus (Gen. 22:8). It involved a painful death on a cross; however, three days later, God's plan was perfectly fulfilled in the resurrection of His beloved Son. However, that is not where evangelism ends, but where it begins.

Evangelism is the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). This information concerning God's plan and the reality of Jesus' life is foundational and crucial to the cause of evangelism. Without Jesus, evangelism cannot occur because He is our salvation (Ex. 15:2; Ps. 27:1; 62:2; Jonah 2:9; Acts 4:12; Rom. 11:11). Without accepting Jesus into one's heart in total faith and submission to Him, evangelism is not complete (Isa. 45:22; Joel 2:32; Mark 13:13; 16:16; John 10:9; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9; I Cor. 15:2; Eph. 2:8-9). The people of the world need to hear that there is a Savior who loves them and desires a relationship with them. They need to know that, by believing and trusting in Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior, they too can be saved! People need to understand that salvation does not come by virtue of osmosis. They must be invited into this relationship in order that salvation may come as a result of their faithful response.

For conservative Methodists, the core value of evangelism is the driving force to any ministry program. Evangelism encapsulates other core values of love, grace, the proclamation of the Gospel, and a burning desire to see transformation occur in the lives of both saints and sinners; therefore, evangelism is a task that must proceed with urgency and intentionality. A major problem within Methodism reveals a disagreement over semantics in regards to finding a

workable definition of salvation and evangelism. As a result, a plethora of definitions and practices exist. In recent years, evangelism has become virtually non-existent among liberals and even among some conservatives. Tom Bandy writes,

Traditional modern churches still expect the majority of church members to ‘cut bait’ in the clouded belief that the need to fish is not particularly urgent...as members simply attend worship services, maintain infrastructures, and send money to generic denominational operating funds, the denominations establish ‘fish processing plants’ that make fine distinctions between the right kind of fish and the wrong kind of fish.<sup>57</sup>

God has already sent His Holy Spirit to earth in order to convict the world of its sins (John 16:5-11) and it is now up to the believer to simply share what God has already done in his or her life. Nothing is more important. It is a two-part process, the faithful witness of the saints and the revelation of God in Spirit and in Truth. God is depending on the church to get that message out.

Conservative Methodists understand the need, the urgency, and the manner by which Christ must be proclaimed. They hold the task of evangelism in very high regards as an uncompromising value which must take priority over every other task that the church or believer may be involved in. George L. Carey writes, “It has been said that they [evangelicals] have been so concerned about preaching Christ that they neglected social and political concerns.”<sup>58</sup> In regards to the task of evangelism after World War II, Ian H. Murray writes, “A characteristic of an evangelical was that he put his evangelical commitment

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<sup>57</sup> Tom G. Bandy, Roadrunner: The Body in Motion, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 18.

<sup>58</sup> George L. Carey, “Introducing Jesus to the World,” Lifeline: Sharing Christ in a Broken World, Eds. Steve Beard and Maggie Schroeder (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2003) 24.

before denominational allegiance.”<sup>59</sup> One contingency does exist though. Long before a believer can become an evangelical zealot, he or she must have first been evangelized. Simply put, in order to share Jesus, one must know Him and have confidence in His ability and desire to save the lost. Niebuhr writes, “No one can be a member of the Christian fellowship who does not acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God.”<sup>60</sup> Without a changed heart, there can be no witness!

John Wesley exhorted his young preachers with these words,

It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as man souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

Robert Coleman adds, “The only infallible proof of a true church of Christ is its ability to seek and to save the lost, to disseminate the Pentecostal spirit and life, to spread scriptural holiness, and to transform all peoples and nations through the Gospel of Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

Conservatives know the consequences of an unrepentant heart; and, while this is certainly not a value, it is an important doctrine. Due to a deep conviction and knowledge of Scripture, conservatives take to heart the words of Jesus, “Unless you repent, you too will perish” (Luke 13:3) and “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter

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<sup>59</sup> Iain H. Murray, The Unresolved Controversy: Unity With Non-Evangelicals, (Great Britain: Howie & Seath, 2001) 5.

<sup>60</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951) 47.

<sup>61</sup> Robert E. Coleman, “Nothing to do but Save Souls.” GoodNews Nov/Dec 1998: 12.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

and will not be able to” (Luke 13:24). For conservatives, hell is a real place and those who reject Christ, either implicitly or explicitly, will not be saved from its grips (Luke 16:19-31). It is a place of eternal torment and total isolation from God. God’s sovereign judgment is real and can only be avoided by trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation. It is this belief that compels conservatives to preach Christ with urgency. Mark writes, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert” (Mark 13:32-33)!

This knowledge of judgment leads to another important value in regards to evangelism: a deep love for God which reciprocates into a love for others. The believer is exhorted to love enemies (Matt. 5:14; Luke 6:32-35), neighbor (Matt. 19:19; Luke 13:34-35; Rom. 13:9; Jas. 2:8), one another (John 15:17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8;), and spouses (Eph. 5:25-33; Col. 3:19; Tit. 2:4;). With God’s love burning in the heart of the believer, a hunger will develop in that person for the purpose of sharing what has been experienced, and there will be a desire to see others live a life of joy and peace. Therefore, intentional evangelism apart from a personal experience with Jesus simply will not occur. Conservatives realize that and continually strive for holiness with hopes that the desire for evangelism never burns out. As God increases, love increases, and evangelism will also increase.

However, even in regards to agape love, there is a danger. Love, in and of itself, is not to be valued over and beyond God Himself. H. Richard Niebuhr writes, “Though God is love, love is not God for Him; though God is one, oneness

is not His God. God whom Christ loves is the 'Lord of heaven and earth.'<sup>63</sup> It is very easy, within many facets of the Christian life, to cling to the creation or to the gift of God while completely missing God! This is very true in Israel where, even today, thousands of believers come each year to worship the places where Jesus walked, while neglecting the one who did the walking! Sadly, there are those within the church today who have embraced a liberalized concept of Christian love much to the detriment of their faith.

Grace is the means by which salvation occurs; however, without faith, grace cannot accomplish its purposes. Conservatives understand that grace alone is not the fulfillment of one's calling to salvation and should never be cheapened with softened promises of eternal happiness or perpetual bliss. Paul Stallsworth, while quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without discipleship, grace without the cross, and grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."<sup>64</sup> Grace is a gift which must be seized with a sense of urgency or despair. It is there, saturated in faith and love, that the believer finally comes into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is there that the believer obtains assurance of their salvation. One problem with today's United Methodist Church is the increasing tendency to soften the Gospel message. Amy Laura Hall writes, "We too often fashion a church that meets the needs of people whose very needs are

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17. <sup>63</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951)

<sup>64</sup> Paul Stallsworth, "The Council of Bishops." Good News March 2006: 24.

distorted and sinful rather than a church that seeks to redefine for the people what their real needs should be.”<sup>65</sup>

Conservatives are committed to biblical preaching and teaching because they know the only way to salvation is through the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it has been revealed through the life of Jesus Christ and through the written testimony of God’s Word. Therefore, the message cannot be watered down, and the discussion of specific sins cannot be avoided for fear of hurting someone’s feelings. Likewise, stern warnings concerning hell and eternal damnation are more than mere punch lines to the latest jokes. Paul wrote to the church of Corinth, “Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (I Cor. 3:14-15).

Finally, conservatives also embrace the value of hope, directed towards the transforming power of Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). Conservatives have faith that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, any soul can be saved, any addiction broken, and any bad situation overturned. As long as God is on the throne and Jesus’ tomb is empty, there is hope in this world. This hope has become the life of the Gospel for all conservatives, and it must be shared. The only hindrance to such transformation is the person’s rejection of God’s redemptive or restorative work. Prevenient grace is at work within every soul, but not every soul embraces the work.

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<sup>65</sup> Amy Laura Hall, “The Law of Love.” The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal, Ed. Paul W. Chilcote (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 178.

For the liberal Methodist, evangelism is a missional chameleon, constantly changing its content and methodology in whatever ways enables them to blend in with society best. Since the Bible is not valued for its message, its authority, or its spiritual formation, then the social or cultural philosophies of the current day take precedent in defining the evangelistic message. Therefore, *their* Gospel message changes with the philosophical seasons; such as modernity, rationalism, relativism, and the social gospel movement, etc. This not only causes an identity crisis within the liberal church, but also within United Methodist campgrounds, campus ministries, theological seminaries, and bake sales. John H. Leith writes, "Liberals approve too easily any program claiming to be on behalf of the oppressed, or for social justice, or for the rights of minorities, ethnic groups, or women."<sup>66</sup> Liberals must begin to evaluate their teachings and ministry more critically if they ever plan on making significant changes in this world.

Sadly, liberals cannot provide an adequate answer to the world's sin problem as long as they continue to avoid conversations that speak directly to apparent afflictions or spiritual conditions. They are so worried about judging someone that no one ever gets the splinter removed from one's own eye (Matt. 7:3). The message of inclusiveness, tolerance, and openness has been twisted so badly that most liberals think it is contrary to the will of God to inquire as to the condition of one's soul. While generically addressing a liberal extreme on this matter, Knight and Saliers write, "The problem with nominal Christianity is that it

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<sup>66</sup> John H. Leith, Crises in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 12.

assumes cognitive assent to doctrines coupled with a respectable, church-going morality is Christianity, and hence effectively blocks persons from experiencing the real thing.”<sup>67</sup>

In a world that is clearly struggling with sin and in the increasing number of mental health and relational illnesses, the only remedy that can be offered by the liberal church is a hug or a pat on the back when what is really needed is a spiritual heart transplant as described by Ezekiel when he writes, “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit into them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh” (Eze. 11:19). Retired Bishop Louis Schowengerdt, in regards to his own pastoral counseling education, writes,

We were not to use the word ‘sin’, because the problem was the conditioning by society and the parents, not the action of the troubled one. Making a moral statement would impose a code of ethics on the counselee, blocking the inner search for the traumatic situations that were causing the behavior.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast to Ezekiel and Bishop Schowengerdt, Victor Paul Furnish writes,

Jesus did not say, “Come, follow my teachings,” but “Come, receive the promise of the Reign of God, and *become my disciples*”. And Paul does not summon us to “walk according to Christian teaching.” He challenges us to “walk worthily of the gospel,” and in the love with which, in Christ, God has already graced and claimed our lives.<sup>69</sup>

Clearly, the liberal church has very little to offer the sinner who stands in need of a spiritual conversion. His sin cannot be addressed for fear of discrimination or being deemed judgmental. Although he will be accepted and loved by the

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<sup>67</sup> Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers, The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 36.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Schowengerdt, “The Devaluing of Evangelism,” Good News March 1993: 16.

<sup>69</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, “The Loyal Opposition and Scripture.” The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality, Eds. Tex Sample and Amy E. Delong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 40-41.



church, he will be given a band-aid for his spiritual cancer. He will not be guided to the truth of Holy Scriptures, and He will not be told about *the sinner's prayer*. He will stay only as long as he continues to be loved by the church. After that, he will walk out the back door and back into his search for salvation.

#### Ministry (Missions):

The mandate for Christian service is not a new concept for the church. For as long as people have been sinning, hurting, and struggling to survive, the church has been reaching out to help. Even among secular institutions, there has long been a call for civic responsibility in caring for the needy. James writes, "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it" (James 2:15-16)? It is intrinsic by nature to care for others and to desire some course of action to bring about resolution to their plight.

Richard G. Cote, defines mission as: "(1) the sending of missionaries to distant lands, (2) the activity effected by that sending, (3) the result and fruit of such activity, such as evangelization and the establishing of local churches, and (4) the place or 'mission field' where the activity occurs."<sup>70</sup> In recent years, it has become quite difficult to find a mutually shared definition of the term *missions*. Once it was understood by most Christians that *all members* of Christ's Church were viewed as missionaries in that they were believers who had been sent out into the world for the purpose of Christian service and the proclamation of the

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<sup>70</sup> Richard G. Cote, Revisioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 7.

Gospel. Today, the word “mission” has become a catch-all phrase which incorporates not only evangelism and church growth, but the feeding of the hungry, hospital visitation, political action, and the rebuilding of lives and homes following a natural disaster, etc. Elaine A. Robinson writes,

The official or formal language of “mission” can be understood in two distinct, but related senses. First, the broader and primary sense of mission refers to the basic purpose...of the UMC: ‘The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.’ In this broader perspective, we would understand the formation of disciples as the primary task of the church. Second, mission is used in a related, but narrower sense of mission as ‘outreach’.<sup>71</sup>

The Book of Discipline says, “We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing.”<sup>72</sup> This sets the precedent for all Methodists that evangelism and outreach must co-exist. Richard G. Cote adds, “My contention is that both missions-inculturating faith and evangelizing cultures-are incumbent on all local churches, regardless of their historical, cultural, or geographical situation.”<sup>73</sup>

Within the context of United Methodism, missional polarization has been evident ever since the 1968 merger. It is manifest in competing outreach programs, displayed favoritism over particular missionaries and projects, and in both raising and dispersing of local church funding for such missional work. The

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<sup>71</sup> Elaine A. Robinson, “The Global Mission of the United Methodist Church.” Considering the Great Commission: Evangelism and Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit, Eds. W. Stephen Gunter and Elaine Robinson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005) 41.

<sup>72</sup> Harriett Jane Olson, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004) 47.

<sup>73</sup> Richard G. Cote, Re-Visioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 40.

reason for such disagreement among liberals and conservatives is due primarily to the break-up of our missional commitment together. Evangelism and Outreach, although held together under denominational structures as well as doctrinal prioritization, have drifted from each other due to the manner by which they have been subsidized and assimilated. The byproduct of conflicting values-missions, both locally and foreign, has suffered due to the political tensions within the church.

It can be argued that, over the past several hundred years, no one has proven themselves more, as an advocate of the needy, than John Wesley. He understood that simply passing out food was not adequate in meeting long-term needs. He wanted to see ongoing programs that met food, medical, and other physical needs. In response to an ongoing cry for help from the oppressed, Wesley “stirred the public conscience through appeals in sermons, conversations, and the press”<sup>74</sup> in order to remedy the social ills around him. In addition, he worked to create a system of medical care for the poor while personally attending medical courses in order to learn to how dispense medicines and treat simple illnesses. He also created an interest free loan program, which he funded from his own pocket and spent many hours helping unemployed persons to find jobs. Our Methodist DNA has always included a strong emphasis on social reform, missional outreach, and personal evangelism.

Whether liberal or conservative, mission work has long been a highly promoted and maintained value within the United Methodist Church. However,

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<sup>74</sup> Manfred Marquardt, John Wesley’s Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 28.

the current confusion over the concept of *true* mission work and the political polarization of our denomination has proven to be detrimental to the Church. Today, the appeal is no longer to “send people” but to “send money”. Similarly, the responsibility for mission work is slowly being taken away from the local churches and passed on to a governing body called the General Board of Global Ministries. The reason is one of distrust of the local church on the basis of knowledge depravation. In regards to the local church undertaking missional work on their own accord, Langford and Willimon write, “Distrust of the local congregation has been the largest factor that has led to our massive decline.”<sup>75</sup>

The general board not only discourages churches from the practice of sending mission teams on their own, they also want the money for such projects. Again, Langford and Willimon write, “The General Conference or a general board or agency decides what the real work of the church is and then informs the lowly local congregation of its responsibility to support financially that work.”<sup>76</sup> This approach to missional work is based on the understanding that the local churches do not possess an adequate amount of wisdom and knowledge concerning the world’s needs and in regards to what is already being done in the world to meet those needs. The denominational boards and agencies believe they are best equipped to make such decisions and to get the necessary work completed. In response Richard Cote writes, “To put missions so completely under the authoritative control and direction of the church’s magisterium is to

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<sup>75</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon, A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 26.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 25-26.

encapsulate the Gospel and thus diminish much of its transforming and liberating power.”<sup>77</sup>

Once again, conflicting values are prominent. For the conservative church, maintaining the notion that the true missional task of the United Methodist Church must include both evangelism and outreach is a core value. Again, the goal is to spread Christianity to all four corners of the world as a faithful response to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) and as a response to God's love. Outreach is a primary means to this evangelistic end. The task is enormous in both implementation and implication. Understanding human limitations, the only way to accomplish such a feat is with the impartation of the Holy Spirit into every facet of ministry. John writes, “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12). Without persistent prayer to support these two missional projects, the accomplishment of these “greater things” will not develop.

Conservatives also value the concept of “hands-on” ministry. One major movement in the church today is for the local church to send work teams to areas where the needs are greatest. While some, like the General Board of Global Missions<sup>78</sup>, may object to such projects, the reality shows that such projects have very positive and long lasting effects on the church as well as the participants. Returning team members are more likely to commit to discipleship, regularly

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<sup>77</sup> Richard G. Cote, Revisioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 9.

<sup>78</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon, A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 26.

attend worship services, and provide financial support of the local church's on-going missional projects. The fact is that it is easier to raise financial support for a particular mission once the people have been able to see the needs with their own eyes and touch the needs with their own hands. If the United Methodist Church is truly committed to making disciples, then it should be expeditious in finding ways to get as many of its members into the mission field as possible.

Conservatives also value inculturation. As defined by Richard Cote, "Inculturation means that Christianity, the faith, must be sown like a seed in...a certain socio-cultural human space, wherein it must find its own proper expression from that culture itself."<sup>79</sup> It is a "process that begins when the local church commits itself unequivocally to having a love affair with the local culture it wishes to court and in which it seeks to live and move and find its being."<sup>80</sup> The Gospel of John tells us "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Metaphorically, the verse illustrates the concept of inculturation. It is the process by which light is distributed in a world of darkness. In each location, the light takes on a peculiar appearance and function unlike any other location. The light is Jesus and once illumined by both outreach and evangelism, transforms the very culture in which it was placed. Conservatives are committed to the development of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Liberals, however, see the task of missions much differently. While de-emphasizing the necessity of conversion via evangelism, the majority of their resources and focus are given to the task of outreach. Outreach, or care-giving,

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<sup>79</sup> Richard G. Cote, Revisioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 21.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 57.

is their missional core value. Believing that it is far more important to witness one's faith in deed, versus word, the liberal church embraces the call to living a life in display of Christian love as its witness. John writes in his epistle, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and truth" (I John 3:18). An increasingly popular doctrine among liberals is the notion that overt evangelistic witness is an arrogant act of religious intolerance or cultural ethnocentrism.

The liberal church also embraces the concept of "hands on" outreach. For similar reasons as do conservatives, liberalism has grown particularly fond of touching people's lives. When connecting to people in their lowest moments, a servant's heart can become more conducive to the work of the Holy Spirit. Often times, this work generates or elevates a deeper love and affection for those we serve. Isaiah writes, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out" (Isa. 42:3). It is an incredible concept to grasp that our painful pasts may actually serve a greater good in our present or future ministry. It is often through those painful memories that Christians are first able to connect with the hurting and displaced. God sometimes allows those wounds to occur in our lives so that we may be more loving. The liberal church sees conservatives as having neglected love; while the conservative church sees liberals as having neglected their *first* love, of God.

Ministry occurs every time God's people display love and kindness to another human. However, a potential concern does exist in regards to the type of value placed upon the individual who stands in need of both evangelism and

outreach. The temptation is to associate the financially poor with the spiritually poor or the physically hungry with the spiritually hungry. Richard Cote writes, “Our sense of mission must first of all be liberated and set free from its moorings of pity and guilt, and grounded more firmly in the simple yet astounding fact of just being Christian. Otherwise we will continue to equate mission with feeling sorry for others.”<sup>81</sup> Everyone needs Jesus; and the church needs to see them as such, not as an opportunity to display our holiness but as an opportunity to share Christ.

#### Worship:

The Great Commandment, as taught by Jesus, says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all of your mind” (Matt. 22:37). “The church exists to worship God”<sup>82</sup> and, among both conservatives and liberals, is highly esteemed as a foundational core value. We worship God, by loving Him and loving others. He is the reason we breathe. All humankind, regardless of faith, is mandated to worship God (1 Chron. 16:29; Ps. 95:6; John 4:24; Rom. 12:1). We worship because of who He is, what He has done, what He is doing, and What He will do in our future. He alone is God and is worthy of our praise (Exod. 15:2; Deut. 32:3; 1 Chron. 16:25; Ps. 33:1; 68:19; 105:2; 106:1; 145:1; 150:6).

Richard J. Foster, quoting William Temple, writes, “To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>82</sup> Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) 103.



of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.”<sup>83</sup> Worship, is an experience with God and involves a temporary collision of His heart and Spirit with ours; an event that can only happen when there is genuine humility in the heart of the believer. The United Methodist Book of Worship says, “Our worship in both its diversity and its unity is an encounter with the living God through the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>84</sup>

Within Methodism, is found a rich history of biblical preaching, singing, expression, sacramental integrity, and structure. “The teachings of Scripture give our worship a basic pattern that has proved itself over the centuries, that gives The United Methodist Church its sense of identity and links us to the Universal Church.”<sup>85</sup> It is discovered that Methodism’s current worship format is deliberate in its appeal to both high and low church worshippers. The Wesleyan emphasis on Word and Table is designed in a way that is conducive for the individual’s personal spiritual growth, congregational worship, and as a model for the church to engage the world.<sup>86</sup>

In regards to polarization, there is very little evidence to suggest that, “How Methodists Worship” has any bearing in regards to our denominations decline. Although *The Book of Worship* has been created to guide the local church in creating an order of worship, it simply stands as a suggestion as to how a church can order its services. Most churches do share a common format for

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<sup>83</sup> Richard J. Foster, Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) 158.

<sup>84</sup> The United Methodist Book of Worship Committee, The United Methodist Book of Worship, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) 13.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>86</sup> Lester Ruth, “Word and Table,” The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002) 136-137.

worship implementation and this format typically contains elements of prayer, singing, sacrificial giving, the spoken Word, and the observance of Holy Communion. However, each church is not required to follow any certain format. As a result, most United Methodist Churches differ in how they do worship and each year at Annual or General Conferences, very little petitioning, discussion, and debating is given in regards to worship. The implication seems to reflect that, in regards to worship, the denomination is not polarized. The question then emerges; “Why aren’t United Methodist Churches polarized in regards to worship?”

*The Book of Worship* informs us,

While the freedom and diversity of United Methodist worship are greater than can be represented by any single order of worship, United Methodists also affirm a heritage of order and the importance of the specific guidance and modeling that an order of worship provides.<sup>87</sup>

Simply stated, there are so many different worship styles and worship preferences across our denomination that one standard form or order of worship could not be established. In other words, autonomy has been awarded to the local church in regards to worship with the only exceptions being in regards to sacramental theology. However, conflicting core values still remain between liberals and conservatives.

Sacramental theology is the most divisive of all subject matter related to worship; particularly, baptism. In recent years, there has been a push to change the church’s doctrinal teaching on the subject of infant baptism which would grant

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<sup>87</sup> The United Methodist Book of Worship Committee, The United Methodist Book of Worship, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) 16.

full membership privileges to every baptismal candidate, regardless of age. While already rejecting the concepts of original sin and reliance on God's grace for justification, liberals embrace the value of inclusion. This is contrary to the current teaching that "baptism is the eradication of original sin and guilt from the individual."<sup>88</sup>

The problem is that the United Methodist teaching on baptism has already been weakening the denomination since the 1968 merger. Due to the softening of our doctrinal and membership standards, the church's focus on confirmation has weakened. Naturally, if liberal clergy are already teaching that sin is irrelevant and that the children are born predisposed to God's grace, then confirmation serves no purpose. John Wesley required repentance and some degree of faith for adult Baptism, and prevenient grace was believed to precede "convincing grace."<sup>89</sup> Confirmation should be a great time of discipleship and proclamation of faith for young teens that have been faithfully raised up in the church and nurtured by the congregation. Conservatives remain true to these values of confirmation and sacrament.

Also in conflict is the concept of biblically anointed preaching. Since Scriptures do not play a major role in the life of the liberal Methodist, preaching is usually found wanting. The typical itinerary of a liberal preaching schedule involves politics, feel good sermons, and tolerance. In many cases, once the chosen Scripture, usually from the liturgical calendar, has been read, the

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<sup>88</sup> Laurence Hull Stookey, "United Methodist Baptismal and Membership Practices in Ecumenical Perspective." Worship Resources, 18 May 2001, GBOD, 13 Feb. 2007 <[http://www.gbod.org/worship/worship/articles.asp?act=reader&item\\_id=2810&loc\\_id=9,1...](http://www.gbod.org/worship/worship/articles.asp?act=reader&item_id=2810&loc_id=9,1...)>

<sup>89</sup> Ole E. Borgen, John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Definitive Study of John Wesley's Theology of Worship, (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985) 127.

preacher never again visits the text! However, the preachers may not be entirely to blame. In regards to the our seminaries failure to adequately train effective ministers, John H. Leith writes,

The task of the seminary is not to produce church historians, professional theologians, or technical biblical scholars. The first task is to prepare preachers who use theological and biblical knowledge to proclaim the gospel and to nurture congregations.<sup>90</sup>

Conservatives value biblical, inspirational, and anointed preaching that can only come happen by virtue of a spiritual attachment to the heartbeat of God. That is why conservatives value the role of prayer in sermon preparation. The only way to know God's heart is through reading His Word and by humbly seeking His face in prayer. Prayer and study are keys to priming Heaven's pump so that God's Spirit may descend upon the church in power and in truth.

The final value is that which embraces the role of the Holy Spirit in worship (John 4:21-24). While evidence does not support the notion that the Holy Spirit can only work within the context of a contemporary or extemporaneous worship service, it can be said that the Holy Spirit works best when sought. Granted, Jesus did teach that "where two or three come together in [His] name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20). However, when the Holy Spirit is being invoked in humility and in great anticipation, God does powerful things (Acts 2:1-4).

For the liberal church, there seems to be some contentment for the role of liturgy. This includes responsive readings, lectionary readings, written prayers, and the singing of the church's standard hymns. Realizing that God can and will bless any worship format that He deems necessary, God does His best work

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<sup>90</sup> John H. Leith, Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997) 18.

when He has been properly invited into the worship planning, as well as the implementation of that worship. Stale and dry worship can and will occur when God has been left out of the planning and implementing processes.

Connectional Relationship:

The most obvious way to identify the core values possessed by both liberals and conservatives is to observe how they interact within the denominational framework and with each other. After nearly 15 years of ministerial service to this denomination, it is confusing for me to note that typically, when a controversial issue surfaces, the conservatives in the room sit on their hands while liberals stand in debate. Michael S. Hamilton and Jennifer McKinney write, “Liberals tend to gravitate into denominational leadership, while evangelicals tend to gravitate into local leadership.”<sup>91</sup> This is no minor concern for a denomination that has been gradually steering off course for well over 40 years. There is not a clear political balance to offset the course. For most of the United Methodist Church’s history, liberals have been in control at both general and annual conference levels which prompts the question, “Where are the conservatives?”

In regards to our connectional system, conservatives are still present and patiently waiting for their turn. It is a safe bet that while valuing the church’s vibrant history, well-grounded theology, and missional involvement, conservatives are not going anywhere. Michael S. Hamilton and Jennifer McKinney highlight three problem areas that have hindered effective political

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<sup>91</sup> Michael S. Hamilton and Jennifer McKinney, “Turning the Mainline Around,” Streams of Renewal: Welcoming New Life Into United Methodism, Eds. James V. Heidinger II and Steve Beard (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2004) 21.

involvement by conservatives within the denomination.<sup>92</sup> The first hindrance is limited political experience which is typically the result of denominational apathy. Lyle Schaller writes, “A majority of the parish pastors display little or no interest in choosing sides for a game of interdenominational quarreling.”<sup>93</sup> The second hindrance is that many conservatives find church politics to be distasteful, often times due to the absence of God’s Spirit among the participants. The third hindrance is that many conservatives believe that what happens in the local church is of far more significance than what happens at the conference level. Liberals believe just the opposite.

Conservative values are not lying dormant; they are actively being implemented into the life of the local church. This reveals another core value among conservatives, the local church. It is believed, by conservatives, that nothing is more important to the denomination than the local church. That is why there is so much indifference to claims from denominational leaders that the denomination does not exist to support the local church, but that the local church exists to support the denomination. Langford and Willimon, in developing a new vision for the denomination, write, “The local congregation is not a branch office for the denomination, not a franchise outlet for denominational programs. The local church is the reason for The United Methodist Church, not vice versa.”<sup>94</sup>

Not necessarily as a precursor to political activism, conservatives do possess the value of commitment to the processes of spiritual renewal of The

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 20-21.

<sup>93</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, The Ice Cube Is Melting: What is Really at Risk in United Methodism? (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) 56.

<sup>94</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon, A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 41.

United Methodist Church. This not only reflects the belief that God *can* save, renew, and transform the church; but, that God *will* save, renew, and transform the church. This is why conservatives do not leave the denomination in search of greener pastures. They simply want to see the church they love and value return to its original state of spiritual vibrancy. The reason for such concern is due to the quick deteriorating of the church's current doctrinal standards and authority.

Iain H. Murray writes,

Let us never forget that we who stand in the historic stream of Christianity really believe that false doctrine, at those crucial points where false doctrine is heresy, is not a small thing. If we do not make clear by word and practice our position for truth as truth and against false doctrine, we are building a wall between the next generation and the gospel.<sup>95</sup>

Therefore, conservative Methodists are very active among renewal groups such as Good News, The Confessing Movement, and Aldersgate Renewal Services Fellowship. The goal is to bring the church back to the original Wesleyan doctrines and ministry distinctives that once made the church great and prominent throughout the first one hundred years. "Renewal movements see liberalism as a deviation from and denial of their denominations' traditional orthodox theologies."<sup>96</sup>

As expected, the renewal movements are making huge strides in getting the church back on track doctrinally and spiritually, much to the criticism of denominational leadership. Richard Cote writes, "Those in positions of

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<sup>95</sup> Iain H. Murray, The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-Evangelicals, (Great Britain: Howie & Seath, 2001) 13-14.

<sup>96</sup> Michael S. Hamilton and Jennifer McKinney, "Turning the Mainline Around," Streams of Renewal: Welcoming New Life Into United Methodism, Eds. James V. Heidinger II and Steve Beard (Wilmore: Living Streams Publications, 2004) 17.

ecclesiastical power and authority naturally tend to be more critical of any movement that threatens to weaken their power.”<sup>97</sup> The problem is that denominational leadership refuses to accept responsibility for failing systems and unhappy membership. To admit there is a problem would be professional suicide. Bureaucrats need money and legitimacy from the local churches, and current financial trends have been weakening their ability to oppose the renewal movements.

Meanwhile, the liberal church places high priorities on the maintenance of current systems and structures, the continued softening of doctrinal standards, the abolishment of current disciplinary rules, and the connectional system. Having been in control of the denominations committees, agencies, and finances for more than thirty years, liberals have certainly grown content with Methodism’s current structures and systems. They are very protective of the old order and have structured the *Discipline* in ways that protect the status quo. Systems are designed to produce a particular result, and our current systems are set up in ways that, “dissipate power, create an isolated bureaucracy, and alienate local congregations.”<sup>98</sup> The problem is that renewal cannot occur within these current systems.

In regards to connectionalism, liberals are truly in the driver’s seat. While controlling most, if not all, of the denominations agencies and committees, they also control much of the denominations funds. To make matters worse, many of

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<sup>97</sup> Richard G. Cote, Revisioning Mission: The Catholic Church and Culture in Postmodern America, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996) 9.

<sup>98</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon, A New Connection: Reforming The United Methodist Church, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 13.



the expenditures are not reported, causing unrest among conservatives. The problem is that liberals are using the denomination's resources to fund projects and underwrite ministries in ways that do not adequately reflect the desires and wishes of the conservative body. Some examples of such stewardship include the support of planned parenthood staffers, anti-war lobbying, and the support of pro-homosexual groups. Loren Mead writes, "When I find that my contributions are being used consistently for things I had no idea they were being used for- then I have a problem and so has the church. I stop trusting them and want to micro manage all their budgetary decisions."<sup>99</sup> The liberal polarity embraces the value of denominational leadership and as a result, naturally gravitates towards those positions of denominational leadership. They will continue to lead the denomination as long as conservatives sit back and let them!

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56. <sup>99</sup> Loren B. Mead, Financial Meltdown in the Mainline? (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1998)

## Chapter Three

### Literature Review

Within Methodism there is a plethora of able writers and theologians who are constantly addressing the issues that United Methodists struggle with as an organization. Yet, when it comes to the issue of polarization and the identification of each polarity's agenda, only implicit referencing can be found. The resources highlighted in this chapter are specified for their helpfulness in identifying those agenda items as well as for their political and theological viewpoints. Attempts have been made to bring equality to the number of resources from each perspective (polarity).

#### Neutral Position Resources:

- Aubrey Malphurs

In his book, *Values Driven Leadership*, Malphurs lends wisdom to the foundational problem within United Methodism: conflicting core values. Everyone has core values and no one can live without them. Values determine who we are as people and what we are likely to fight for or defend if those values were to ever come under attack. "They give each organization its unique identity in the ministry world"<sup>100</sup> while also serving to dictate direction, whether individually or corporately. The discovery of values also assists the process of identifying underlying passions or pet peeves. Simply put, values communicate what is truly important by indicating an organization's "bottom line."<sup>101</sup> He goes on to write

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<sup>100</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering Your Core Values for Ministry*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) 14.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 18.

that “core values are the constant, passionate, biblical core beliefs that drive its [organization’s] ministry.”<sup>102</sup>

The discovery and implementation of core values save time, energy, and certainly money. However, more importantly, understanding core values saves relationships. It is true that everyone has his or her own core values which are usually derived from personal experience as well as from the nurturing teaching from parents, siblings, educational leaders, and societal leaders. Whether we realize it or not, there are intrinsic core values inside each of us. They define us. We will fight for them, devote most of our time and money in order to maintain them, and we will not compromise them.

Relative to the issue of polarization, Malphurs writes “if you are able to bring to the surface and clarify the values fueling the conflict, you are well on your way to resolving the conflict or to determining a resolution.”<sup>103</sup> The problem with polarization is that the values of each polarity are not always communicated, a circumstance that leaves too much room for speculation concerning motivations. There will always be some who use this voluntary withholding of information in a way that enables them to control or manipulate the issue, while others may not have an adequate understanding that values lie beneath the surface of their issues or conflicts. Either way, the end result is often divorce, separation, or schism because the participants grew apart.

Values are foundational building blocks upon which all relationships are built and the goal is to share as many values as possible with those whom we

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 45.

desire to enter into a relationship. The number of commonly shared values will indicate the foundational strength of those relationships. It applies to marriage, to business, to employment, even to the United Methodist Church. Granted, there will never be 100% compliance with each and every value, but that is not the goal. The health of any relationship will ultimately be determined by the number of common values shared.

- Lyle E. Schaller

The most thorough publication found on the subject of symptom identification, as pertaining to United Methodism's struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is Schaller's *The Ice Cube is Melting: What is Really at Risk in United Methodism?* In the book, Schaller depicts the statistics which precisely paint the picture of a denomination in turmoil as he highlights declining membership, the closing of churches, and the overall attitude among its membership today. Where he differs from so many other writers on the subject is that he doesn't just stop once the symptoms have been identified. He offers suggestions as to how the denomination could save itself from continuing decline.

While Schaller does assist in determining the values of each of the main theological polarities, he also gives much detail and thought to the ideas of schism, systematic restructuring, and the concept of autonomy. One question that Schaller raises is "do congregations exist primarily to resource the denomination or to do ministry?"<sup>104</sup> This question brings up more issues of conflicting values, forcing the reader to decide which is the most important: the

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<sup>104</sup> Lyle E. Schaller, *The Ice Cube is Melting: What is Really at Risk in United Methodism?* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) 62.

local church and its ministries or the denomination and its ministries? Because much of the denomination is under the influence of the liberal agenda, (statistics show the Southeast Jurisdiction as an exception) it is easy to see that the “connectional system” rules the day. This further explains why the liberal agenda incorporates a value of systemic preservation of the current structures.

Furthering the discussion, Schaller also sheds light on the issue of “covenant community” verses “voluntary association.” This debate further notes the low demand threshold into the church of liberalism verses the high demand threshold into the conservative church. Again, this reveals the values of grace (liberal) over transformation (conservative). As a whole, it appears that the United Methodist Church is a denomination of low commitment, low expectations, and low threshold of entry. This is manifest in areas of church school commitment, stewardship, and certainly ministry involvement. The conversation further explains the conservative’s value of discipline and accountability which is greatly affected by the value of sanctification.

- Loren Mead

In his book, *Financial Meltdown in the Mainline*, Loren Mead of the Alban Institute addresses one of the most critical issues facing United Methodism today regardless of political preference and that is the issue of finances. The issue is so pertinent because of the effect it has on every single church in the denomination, regardless of size as well as every single pastor, regardless of years in service. Not only is Methodism facing a membership shortage, it is facing a financial crisis. In fact, the problem is so significant that the church may

not be able to reverse the trends. In this book, Mead uses such harsh language as meltdown and crisis in order to get the attention of laity and clergy alike because this is a very serious issue and has tremendous effects on our future as a church.

The book explains, in very simple terms, the issues that are negatively affecting the denomination's finances, including clergy pension, clergy insurance, rising apportionments, and the misappropriations of funds. Churches, much like individuals, put money where their hearts are. In other words, money follows values and Mead's statistics reveal that small churches place very high value on pastoral leadership while larger churches may place value on staffing, missions, or building maintenance. The problem is that, while membership numbers are decreasing and church budgets are increasing, there are fewer people paying more than ever before for ministry and with smaller incomes.<sup>105</sup>

Mead does a great job of predicting trends that have since come to reality for the church. The frequency of litigation against the church has certainly increased, insurance rates have sky-rocketed, and utility costs are hindering the strongest of churches. In addition, clergy health insurance costs are getting so high many of the retired clergy are struggling to meet their co-pays and deductibles. Even active clergy now have to pay a portion of their monthly premium while still receiving minimal raises each year, and administrative mismanagement of resources continues to escalate. As Mead touches on so many of the financial issues permeating the church, it is understandable as to

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<sup>105</sup> Loren Mead, Financial Meltdown in the Mainline? (Bethesda: Alban Institute Publication, 1998) 28.

why the author would doubt that the trends will ever be reversed. In fact, finances will probably mean death to the denomination.

- H. Richard Niebuhr

Probably the most poignant of all of these resources, has been the work of H. Richard Niebuhr and his work entitled *Christ and Culture*. With much clarity, he succeeds in identifying key core values of several different types of ministry paradigms which can easily implicate theological polarities, neither of which are free from his astute criticism and words of optimism. The main premise of the book concerns what the role of Jesus Christ [church] is supposed to be in relation to the world in which we exist. This book is one of Christology as well as one of Ecclesiology.

The reason this book is so instrumental to this thesis project is because Niebuhr does an excellent job of locating Jesus in the midst of several different ministry paradigms which in turn reveals values. Obviously, all Christians would indicate that their relationship to Jesus Christ is extremely important to them as believers in the body of Christ. However, these questions need to be asked. What are you doing with Jesus? What is Jesus calling you to do with your new-found faith? How does your relationship with Jesus affect your relationship to culture?

Regardless of which paradigm or polarity you may embrace as a believer, Niebuhr highlights both positives and negatives of that paradigm. The two extremes addressed in his models indicate either too much emphasis on culture in interpreting Christ in ministry or too little emphasis on culture in interpreting

Christ in ministry. In regards to polarization, he seems to be saying that, on one side, there are conservatives who embrace the Christ who interprets ministry and revelation to them, yet have a small audience (culture) in which to present their message. On the other hand, there are liberals who embrace the world so much that they are willing to allow culture to interpret Christ and His ministry to them and have a large audience to show for it. One side values the message while the other side values the culture.

The other three paradigms meet in the middle of the spectrum, all trying to figure out a healthy balance between Christ and culture. The Christ above culture paradigm represents a church struggling to exist in the midst of culture while still protecting its spiritual vitality in Jesus. The notion is that, since God created the heavens and the earth he must also be the Creator of culture. Therefore, "Christ and the world cannot be simply opposed to each other. Neither can the 'world' as culture be simply regarded as the realm of godlessness."<sup>106</sup> For those Christians in the center, there is a clear recognition of the primacy of grace and the necessity of works of obedience.<sup>107</sup>

For the paradoxical believer, there may be a sort of spiritual confusion as to when to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and when to render to God what is God's. Niebuhr calls this the "dualist" paradigm and reflects where most believers are today, compartmentalizing their lives to please both God and self. In this paradigm, Niebuhr addresses the values of *self*, both in Christ and apart

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<sup>106</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1951) 117.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 119.



from Christ, leading the reader to wonder if a believer in paradox truly knows Christ. Why would anyone only want a part of Christ?

The Christ as transformer of culture paradigm is a model which should give the most hope to the world and to the church. This paradigm exhibits a healthy balance between embracing culture while also maintaining an understanding of sin's power over the unbeliever. The goal is to maintain an attitude of grace and love to the unbeliever and display that love in such a way as to be able to present the message of reconciliation and forgiveness in a non-threatening manner. Within the paradigm of Christ transforming culture, it appears to contain a large percentage of shared values between both liberals and conservatives. Implementing this paradigm presents the difficulties.

- Dean M. Kelley

*Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion* is exactly what the title implies; it is a sociological study of the church. The reason for its inclusion in this thesis review is due to Kelley's incredible insight into the causes of church growth as well as hindrances to church growth. From a non-partisan perspective, he adequately details several key features that apparently serve to elevate growing churches and where these details are non-existent, their demise. In this book, the reader is shown many facts and findings that stand without debate. Kelley's opinions are insightful and not necessarily expected.

Kelley's statistical findings reveal that in each of the declining mainline denominations, Church School enrollment dropped significantly 3 to 5 years prior

to the membership decline. Closely related, he also notes a considerable decrease in Church School publications and books coincided with the declines. Likewise, churches were experiencing a decline in the number of missionaries sent abroad with the United Methodist Church decreasing from 1,453 in 1958 to 1,175 in 1971.<sup>108</sup>

In response to his findings, Kelley questions the viability of the churches and their effect on society. His own discoveries reveal that the church is, in fact, relevant and has a very important role in proclaiming Christ in the world. What is not needed is the same type of output from the church as the world has been getting. He comments that the daily walk of believers must match their beliefs, the benefits of salvation in Jesus Christ must be differentiated to the non-believers, and the church needs to remember that religion will go on forever without them. It appears that he means the church is making it hard for non-believers to find the true God.

The most interesting finding in the book is that, although many mainline denominations are declining, there are still many others who are increasing. These include the Southern Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists, Nazarenes, Jehovah's Witnesses and the Salvation Army. In fact, all of the Pentecostal churches are growing at a surprising rate. Indicative of such growth is the building of truly massive worship arenas and sanctuaries. Some of these are designed to seat up to 20,000 worshippers. So, what does this say about the mainline denominations? Kelley writes, "The declining churches are not victims

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<sup>108</sup> Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing: A Study in Sociology of Religion with a new Preface for the Rose Edition, (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986) 10.

of changing times but of internal failure-the inability to provide a needed product or service.”<sup>109</sup>

In the increasing churches and denominations, a few common values are discovered: commitment, discipline, and missionary zeal.<sup>110</sup> To support his findings and opinions, he uses such stories in history as the early Methodist movement led by John Wesley and the circuit riders, the Anabaptist movement, and the Mormon migration. Each of these successful movements included a strict code of discipline, a passionate zeal for reaching the lost for Christ, and the high level of expectations. Completely contrary to what the mainline church is doing with its resources and energy.

Liberal Position Resources:

- Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers

When Knight (evangelical) and Saliers (sacramental Methodist) came together to co-author the book *The Conversation Matters*, their attempt was to come from a bi-partisan direction to address the important needs within our denomination for dialogue. What both authors contributed to this thesis project was to identify a few of the foundational values that make liberals who they are and values that make conservatives who they are surrounding the issue of conversation.

The very nature of the book indicates that one intrinsic value of both mainline polarities is the idea of *dialogue*, or what John Wesley referred to as Christian Conferencing. It requires a commitment from both parties to unity, yet,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 58.

it also involves a certain element of sacrifice. As quoted on page 13, “conferencing concerns how to work at theological differences in the ordinary course of the church’s ministry and common struggles.”<sup>111</sup> Obviously, there are very few Methodists who would disagree that John Wesley and the early Methodists were right by coming together for the purpose of Christian Conferencing. However, we must understand that John Wesley and the early Methodists did not struggle with issues that questioned or challenged basic tenets of the Christian faith such as virgin birth, resurrection, and the authority of Holy Scripture.

Yet, the main theological premise is that by joining together in Christian conversation, both polarities will gain opportunity to understand the “other’s” point of view. The hope is that by coming together for dialogue, common ground would be found somewhere in the theological middle, where most United Methodists can be found on any given Sunday. However, this assumption fails to understand just how significant values are to any believer. Values are non-negotiable. Values are defining. Values are lines of demarcation. The reason *dialogue* breaks down is because conservative values are built upon *doctrinal integrity* and liberal values are built upon *grace*. Both authors seem to agree that dialogue begins to break down immediately when either side begins to feel their intrinsic values are going to be attacked or compromised.

However, the beauty of this book reveals that it doesn’t matter on which side of an issue you may find yourself. What matters is whether we truly love

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<sup>111</sup> Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers, The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 13.

God and embrace the value of Christian Conferencing and that we will do whatever it takes to mend the theological marriage that brought us together nearly 40 years ago. The real question is how committed to marriage are we? They also write “to deny the necessity of speaking about Christian doctrine because the very conversation is divisive is like the denying of marital problems, or conflicts and hurts that slowly undermine friendships.”<sup>112</sup>

The book also addresses the conservative value of Divine *revelation and discernment* on the issue of Biblical authority verses the liberal value of *love and compassion*. As one bishop said to me years ago about a separate matter, “I would rather see you error on the side of grace, than the side of legalism.” I believe that is the nature of the liberal agenda. People’s lives are more important to them than right or wrong and therefore the church must conform to meet the people’s needs. On the other hand, conservatives care about people, but believe people must conform to the ways of God. These deeply entrenched values make dialogue a very difficult task and one that can only be attempted in complete faith and fervent prayer.

- Tex Sample and Amy E. DeLong (editors)

*The Loyal Opposition* is a collection of essays, sermons, and articles written from the perspective of the liberal polarity in regards to the issues surrounding homosexuality in the church. The reading of this book has been extremely influential in balancing this thesis politically and spiritually alike. The writings within are truly heartfelt, experiential, provocative, and filled with values

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 17.

statements, and speculations in regards to the values shared by their theological counterparts.

What will be discovered in this book are values that stand in obvious conflict, not just with the conservative polarity, but also with the denomination as a whole. Seeing themselves as the minority, the liberals, in regards to homosexuality and their acceptance in the church, stand very firm in opposition to the doctrines and principles that have been part of Methodism since its inception. The values that emerge throughout this book serve to give the reader a prophetic picture into the future of this debate. Those values include subversion, opposition, resistance, and defiance. One contributor, Joretta L. Marshall writes,

Faith is made whole in persons who continue to believe that rules and legal systems-even those of the church-sometimes must be challenged, and perhaps, disobeyed...consciously disobeying church polity because of moral convictions-embodies the redemptive ministry of the institutional church.<sup>113</sup>

If the liberal polarity values resistance and defiance more than the embrace of their own church, then there is a problem. Yet, theology and doctrine is what they are resisting, not the love of their church.

What it all comes down to for the liberal polarity is the maintenance and protection of their main core values: love and grace. Laced throughout the words of each contributor, these values make it quite obvious that liberals care deeply about the hurting, the oppressed, and the disconnected. They love to love and want as many people as possible to experience the grace that they have come to

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<sup>113</sup> Tex Sample and Amy E. Delong, eds., The Loyal Opposition: Struggling with the Church on Homosexuality, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000) 160-161.

love and adore. Acceptance and inclusion are manifestations of that love. What will not be found in this book are words such as discipline, repentance, and sanctification which may cause the reader to question whether or not love can exist without boundaries.

Conservative Position Resources:

- Andy Langford and William H. Willimon

*A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church* is a book written to encourage the reader to take a deep critical look at the structures and systems that hold our church together. The reason this book is a significant contributor to this thesis is due to its straight forward critique of the structures that govern the church as well as its critique of the church's mismanagement of resources. In revealing the content's delicateness, the authors write, "In any organization, when things are not going well, there are always those who urge silence, unquestioning loyalty, and the suppression of all criticism."<sup>114</sup>

In the book, the authors seemed to have assessed that the primary problem within Methodism is the need for structural and systematic reform. Critical of the power structures (top down), the apportionment formula, and to the appointment system, Methodism is seen as an outdated form for any organization. Problematic is that the liberal values of those in power are very protective of the status quo governing that led them to their positions of authority in the first place. The connection, loosely defined, yet strictly articulated to the body, is the sacred cow and while fearing repercussion from on top, the body is

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<sup>114</sup> Andy Langford and William H. Willimon, *A New Connection: Reforming the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 13.

paralyzed with fear to demobilization. This is where we should find true foundational values among the conservative ranks. Do they value the local church? Are they passionate about her? Are they uncompromising in their defense of her? Or, is personal preservation the motivating value?

It appears that the book has succeeded in calling to arms all who are in disagreement with the current status quo leadership and systems. The authors have even gone to such great lengths as to suggest just how the constitution of the church should be approached and implemented in every annual conference. The authors clearly value the local churches and envision a return of power to where it belongs...in the hands of the local churches.

- Maxie Dunnam and H. Newton Malony (editors)

*Staying the Course: Supporting the Church's Position on Homosexuality* is the conservative response to *The Loyal Opposition*, edited by Tex Sample and Amy E. Delong. Throughout this book, the reader will find a collection of essays, sermons, and articles which serve to address the issues surrounding homosexuality within the United Methodist Church. What will be discovered are the core values embraced by conservatives that permeate their perspectives and motivations in ministry.

Foundational for conservatives is the value of Scriptural authority. For Methodism...Scripture has traditionally been integral to both its orthodoxy and orthopraxy. However, for the conservative, Scripture alone is not sufficient, and that leads to a second value which cannot be separated from the first. That is the value of Divine Revelation. William J. Abraham writes,



Once one comes to see something as revelation, then one has crossed over into a world in which he or she has to treat the revelation as knowledge. One has to obey it, to hold tenaciously and even passionately to it, and in some instances to be prepared to die for it.<sup>115</sup>

Scripture, apart from revelation, are just words written on a page. This is why debates can be so heated between conservatives and liberals on any given issue. Conservatives believe and value the inspiration and revelation of God through those Scriptures. They give life and meaning to the believer and therefore, cannot be compromised or disregarded.

Conservatives also value the United Methodist Church including its history, its theology, its doctrines, and certainly its ministry to the world. That is why there is such an adamant attempt to protect the church, the theology, etc. So the challenge then is to provoke the rest of the denomination who also share in the value of preservation to serve faithfully and passionately in order to keep the church alive. To conservatives, the United Methodist Church is not just another social or civic group. It is the place where God is. A place where miracles happen and lives are changed.

Conservatives also value salvation and sanctification. Bishop Robert E. Fannin writes, "There is no doubt that we are all sinners and need the forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ. The turning point that leads us closer to God comes when we choose to denounce our sins and vow to lead a new and different life."<sup>116</sup> Sin is the enemy and, when left alone or given free access to our church, will weaken, if not destroy, our witness to the world. The main thrust

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<sup>115</sup> Maxie D. Dunnam and H. Newton Malony, eds., Staying the Course: Supporting the Church's Position on Homosexuality, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003) 24.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 39.

which serves this thesis is the concept of sanctification. Where liberals do not like to use words such as repentance, confession, and discipline, the conservatives believe genuine love cannot exist without them. Within the context of a loving relationship, there must be boundaries, perimeters, discipline, and sacrificial commitment to the relationship. This book does much more than give understanding to the issue of homosexuality; it explains why conservatives are so protective of Scripture and why they don't maintain a high threshold of entry for the world.

Topic Related Contributors:

- Pluralism

Pluralism is a concept implicitly crafted in the 1920's as a result of the Scopes Monkey Trial with a focus of widening the theological spectrum of the church in order to accommodate various theological and ideological points of view while still *being* the church. Pluralism implies variety and, as Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr. writes in his book, *Mainline Churches and the Evangelicals*, mainline churches are "pluralistic by design."<sup>117</sup> Even as late as 1988, United Methodists were still trying to make the idea of pluralism a doctrinal standard as indicated by Jerry Walls in his book, *The Problem With Pluralism*.<sup>118</sup>

Walls and Hutcheson succeed at illustrating how pluralism has been embraced by many within the church, while at the same time illustrating how pluralism will never work in the church. The very premise of pluralism is founded

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<sup>117</sup> Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *Mainline Churches and the Evangelicals: A Challenging Crisis?* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973) 21.

<sup>118</sup> Jerry L. Walls, *The Problem of Pluralism: Recovering United Methodist Identity*, (Wilmore: Bristol Books, 1988) 4.

upon the notion that both sides must learn to give in or compromise some of their core, foundational values. The goal, of course, is to address the needs of the larger church which finds itself theologically and ideologically somewhere in the middle of the issues. As stated by Hutcheson, “a consciously planned pluralism might create a climate in which a consensus of the middle can develop.”<sup>119</sup> The problem is that, by definition, core values are non-negotiable.

Other resources which address the push for pluralism include *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education*<sup>120</sup>, by John Leith; *The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-Evangelicals*<sup>121</sup>, by Iain H. Murray; and, *Can Mainline Denominations Make a Comeback?*<sup>122</sup>, by Tony Campolo. Without downplaying the issues that affect the church today, each of the authors help to paint a picture of the church struggling to maintain its identity in an ever increasing secular world. The consistent criticism reflects that, in the midst of the issues, the church has ceased to be the interpreter of the times. In some ways, the church has lost its credibility. In other ways, it has lost its focus. Regardless, the church will not be revived numerically or spiritually until it has regained its identity and its witness. This task will require humility, fervent prayer, and major systemic restructuring of our connectional ministries. It will have to regain its spiritual fervor and its backbone in order to stand firm in the midst of ongoing crises.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>120</sup> John H. Leith, *Crises in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

<sup>121</sup> Iain H. Murray, *The Unresolved Controversy: Unity With Non-Evangelicals*, (Great Britain: Howie & Seath, 2001).

<sup>122</sup> Tony Campolo, *Can Mainline Denominations Make a Comeback?* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1995).

- Authority of Scripture

To shed light on the debate of scriptural authority and divine revelation, the books *How United Methodists Study Scripture*<sup>123</sup>, edited by Gayle C. Fulton; *To Serve The Present Age: The Gift & Promise of United Methodism*<sup>124</sup>, by J. Phillip Wogaman, and *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal*<sup>125</sup>, edited by Paul W. Chilcote were selected. Upon a complete reflection of the polarization within United Methodism, it does not take long to discover that the use of Scripture, and its interpretation thereof, is the apparent starting place of nearly every debate. The authors listed serve to illuminate the various issues associated with Holy Scriptures.

Wogaman reflects the nature of the debate when he writes, “If the impression is left that a good Christian will accept *everything* in the Bible as factually true, then how is one to deal with the inconsistencies and the direct conflicts with well-known truths about the natural world?”<sup>126</sup> His quote is an accurate illustration as to the nature of the church’s debate over the authority of Scripture. Through these resources, the reader will get a very clear indication of the core values that emerge from both polarities in regards to this issue. What will also emerge is a deeper understanding of the conflicting perspectives with regards to Scripture. It appears that, for the conservative, Scripture serves to give meaning to life. For the liberal, it is life that gives meaning to Scripture.

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<sup>123</sup> Gayle C. Fulton, Ed. How United Methodists Study Scripture, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

<sup>124</sup> J. Philip Wogaman, To Serve The Present Age: The Gift & Promise of United Methodism, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

<sup>125</sup> Paul W. Chilcote, Ed. The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).

<sup>126</sup> J. Phillip Wogaman, To Serve the Present Age: The Gift & Promise of United Methodism, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 49.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Project Design**

Throughout American Methodism, polarization has been dividing our church with absolutely no prejudice to ethnic, social, political, or economic status. As a result, the church is losing members, closing churches, and fighting over doctrinal issues that should stand with no debate. Embarrassing as it may be, the church has failed to transform, or even influence, our surrounding culture for Jesus Christ. Instead, the culture has been transforming and influencing the church. America is a nation that thrives on a dominant, conflicted, and boisterous two-party system. The church is now modeling that behavior. The problem is that a house divided against itself cannot stand (Matt. 12:25); and, where there is no unity, chaos and division reign supreme.

For nearly as long as there has been a United Methodist Church, there has been talk of church split, schism, and realignment. This thesis project was an attempt for me to evaluate the current values that guide our denominational systems and structures in order that I may better understand the dynamics surrounding the issues of our day. Naturally, I have questions that need to be answered if I am going to be able to remain a United Methodist pastor while maintaining a clear conscience. For example: Why does the United Methodist Church struggle with political and social polarization? Is it my assumption, or are conservatives a threat to the current denominational systems and structures?

Will the United Methodist Church survive? What does the future of our denomination look like?

Historical Analysis:

In order to identify the existing core values of both conservative and liberal polarities within our church, I performed a historical analysis of our denomination, dating back to John Wesley and the early Methodist movement in America. The goal was to identify those core values that were evident during times of church split, schism, or sharp membership decline and/or growth. Since being founded in 1784, the Methodist Church has endured numerous church splits through the years. Yet, it wasn't until the 1844 split over slavery that the church truly began to lose its grip on America. Prior to that split, the "Methodists had become the most numerous religious body in America, with 1,068,525 members, 3,988 itinerant preachers, 7,730 local preachers, and in incalculable number of regular hearers".<sup>127</sup>

Throughout the history of the church, it is discovered that during times of numerical growth, there was a period of deliberate commitment to evangelism, spiritual disciplines, and small group ministry. Surprisingly, much of this ministry was implemented and maintained by laity efforts. In fact, much of the early Methodist movement was laity led.<sup>128</sup> Both laity and clergy were actively pursuing the lost and teaching them about Jesus. Their evangelism was propelled by their personal commitment to spiritual disciplines and the new

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<sup>127</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 437.

<sup>128</sup> Frederick A. Norwood, The History of American Methodism, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992) 61-70.

converts seldom balked at the expectations placed upon them. This was Wesley's influence at work; an influence which he obtained from the Moravians.

In contrast, it was discovered that whenever the denomination struggled numerically, evangelism, spiritual piety, and laity involvement were all deemphasized. By 1830, in association with the westward expansion of our nation, the church began to experiment with the idea of both itinerant preachers and local preachers. This decision weakened the role and authority of the layperson while increasing the local church's dependence on its clergy. In addition, the newly formed position of local pastor shifted the clergy's role from evangelist to chaplain. Naturally, the focus of the local church shifted from an external witness to the world to an internal shepherding of the flock.

One major factor in the church's struggles as a denomination has been the frequent occurrence of church splits and the values which led to those splits. In regards to the Wesleyan Church, Nazarene Church, the Church of God, and, the Free Methodist Church, the issue of holiness was an area of dissatisfaction. On a positive note, the holiness movement called Methodists to a deeper walk with the Lord through prayer, worship, and biblical study. On a negative note, the movement polarized the entire denomination.

The prevailing concern was that Methodist doctrine did not take the issue of Christian perfection far enough. The doctrines of second blessing and entire sanctification began to challenge the church. While facing stiff opposition to change current doctrine and polity, the various holiness groups all left the Methodist fellowship. In turn, denominational leaders became apprehensive and

negative anytime talk of spiritual awakenings or revival movements were mentioned. In my first appointment as a Youth Pastor, I recall a conversation that I had with the senior pastor in regards to revival. He told me that “offering salvation to an individual when they have been made vulnerable by harsh preaching spiritual worship is not always good for one’s soul.” The reason, he said, “was because once a person experiences a spiritual high, there is only one way to go from there and that is down.” Ahlstrom writes, “The Methodist churches, North and South, were swept away by a great Holiness Revival, and the preaching and practice of this doctrine led to religious manifestations which most Methodist leaders tended to discountenance as disruptive and unseemly.”<sup>129</sup> Clearly, that apprehension is still being evidenced today!

Another leading factor in the church’s struggle has been in regards to physical prosperity. As the church continued to grow numerically throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it also began to grow influentially, economically, and politically. The problem is that money and power corrupts, and the church has been no exception. The results of such success are found in the slothfulness, selfishness, and complacency of our clergy and our denominational leadership. Jesus warned us, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24). In the beginning, discipline and responsibility guided the church; but, the spiritual boldness once possessed has since been replaced with a spirit of fear and intimidation. Today, many of our members and clergy live in defiance of discipline. Many of our

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<sup>129</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972) 816-817.



clergy and leadership live in fear and worry that someone in the pews may get offended by our expecting too much of them or by preaching against sin.

In essence, the Methodist Church has lost its backbone for ministry. The historical data all reveals that Wesley's values have become a thing of the past. We are no longer motivated to go out into the world preaching Christ. Our clergy and leadership have usurped the authority for ministry that once resided upon the shoulders of our laity. We have become fearful and intolerant of spiritual renewal and revival. And, we have grown fat off of the offerings and gifts of our people. To this we must beware. In Ezekiel, God disciplined the priests of Israel due to their own form of selfishness and slothfulness, "I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them" (Eze. 34:10).

A final discovery from history reveals that the Social Gospel movement, along with the liberal and universalism movements, has performed a great disservice for our denomination. Much of this influence is discovered in the shift from biblical preaching, to "issues" preaching. This became most evident to me in 1992. The church I was serving was celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of their ministry to the community. The guest speaker was the current residing bishop of that same annual conference. While assuming an Episcopal "pat on the back," I was quite surprised to hear a poorly delivered anti-Iraq War appeal. Five years later, I can honestly say that I have never heard the bishop preach anything but political and social mandates. The people are starving for the Word of God and

they are not being fed, and all the while we are losing an average of 3,729 members per year as an annual conference (See Appendix 2).

The historical analysis has revealed to me that the conflicting values of which we struggle with today began to surface around 1836-1844. While many church historians will point to slavery, urbanization, and the age of enlightenment as the cause of separation, I still charge that these events were only symptoms of a much greater problem. The church was polarized politically, socially, and spiritually. There was a spiritual line of demarcation that almost paralleled the political line of demarcation. With some exceptions, the North was being influenced by rationalism, reason, urbanization, and a rising liberalism that countered the slowly progressing southern values of spiritual discipline, family, complacency, conservatism, and racial purity (sadly).

My conclusion is that the only way the United Methodist Church can ever reverse the current trends and find redemption is through a renewed commitment to genuine evangelism, laity empowerment, and spiritual disciplines. "Genuine" evangelism must include both a solid witness of God's redemptive work in one's life and the revelation of God. Laity empowerment means more than laity involvement; laity must be given the power to make decisions and they must be adequately trained to do ministry in a way that enhances the ministry of the clergy. A commitment to the spiritual disciplines must include biblical study, prayer, fasting, worship, Christian service, and accountability. A return to these Wesleyan distinctives will eventually lead to renewed vision, spiritual vitality, and financial recovery. If the United Methodist Church can learn to embrace humility

(corporately and individually) and seek the face of God in these areas, I believe redemption can occur.

#### Interview Research and Statistical Analysis:

In 1992, I officially became a candidate for the ordained ministry in the United Methodist Church. Even before attending my first session of annual conference, I was hearing comments among fellow candidates and clergy acquaintances in regards to the denominations struggles and loss of membership. In my eyes, it was unusual to note that during annual conference sessions, I never heard a single presenter address the issues of decline. What I did discover was a calm openness among clergy to share their thoughts and opinions on the issues. Although informal, many of those discussions and interviews will be incorporated into this chapter on research.

In addition to these conversations, I have spent a great deal of time researching statistical information in regards to membership trends, professions of faith, and clergy trends. The statistical information has been gathered from both the General Conference Minutes of our denomination and the Annual Conference journal of my current Annual Conference. For the General Church, the data begins just prior to the merger of 1968. For the Annual Conference, data begins in 1996 following the merger of the Southern Illinois and Central Illinois Annual Conferences into the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference (IGRC).

From 1965, three years prior to merger, to 2003, the United Methodist Church has endured the loss of nearly five million members. Three million of

those members were lost in the three years preceding merger! In parallel to this data, the number of churches has also declined from 40,644 in 1969, to only 34,892 in 2003. It is my belief that the merger in 1968 should have never taken place. The 60's were a very turbulent decade spiritually, politically, morally, and certainly nationally. It was a divisive period for everyone, and the call from the social gospel movement and liberalism was for unity at all cost. The Vietnam War was certainly divisive, as was the civil rights movement, segregation, feminism, and space exploration. The call to unity was an appropriate appeal; however, merging the two denominations was certainly not going to bring about world peace. Obviously, three million Methodists and Evangelicals thought it was the wrong direction for the church.

Unity could have only been achieved if both churches were willing to compromise their values and by being the much larger of the two bodies, the MEC did not have much to lose. On the other hand, the Evangelicals had everything to lose, including their church properties, their ministry distinctives, their schools, their publishing house, even their leadership. In regards to the merger, many voted with their feet, resisting the merger and leaving the denomination. The reason is because their core values conflicted with the core values of the MEC. Such conflicts cannot be resolved easily.

Over the years, I have developed a close friendship with a man who had served the Methodist Church for nearly 15 years prior to the merger in 1968. He was ordained, and had served both as a local pastor and as a conference evangelist. He was one of many who did not go along with the merger. His

primary reason for resisting was in regards to the rising political climate at that time. Particularly, he mentions the devaluation of missionary work and the rise of liberalism among the denomination's leadership. In regards to the MEC clergy, he would refer to them as CCC pastors (compromising conference climbers). It really bothered him to see the emphasis placed on the church hierarchy and the usurping of power from the local churches. In addition, he struggled with the denomination's emphasis of the connectional system which cut off many missionaries and mission organizations from local church support. The biggest problem with that shift, in his opinion, was the loss of evangelism as a prominent responsibility of United Methodist missionaries. Even before the merger, the shift had begun from evangelistic focus to social action and social reform.

The most unusual finding from the statistics reveals that while membership continues to decline at an alarming rate, the number of clergy continues to rise! To further muddy the water, it is important to note that, during that same time frame, nearly 6,000 churches have closed their doors. So, where are the clergy serving? Whom are they serving? If the number of "effective" clergy is on the rise, why isn't there also a rise in the number of effective churches and effective believers? Through personal observation, research, and ongoing Christian conversation, it seems as if the ordained ministry is actually weakening.

Statistics also reveal that since 1969, the annual number of professions of faith has also gone down from 202,610 to 188,273. These numbers are very misleading for the assumption is that the concept of "profession of faith" is the

same today as it was in 1969. That is definitely not the case. In early Methodism, a profession of faith took place when a person would prayerfully confess their sins, admit their dependence on God for salvation, and invite Jesus Christ into his or her heart. In today's church, a profession of faith can include any person who wishes to join a particular church or, anyone who has been confirmed. Each and every church functions as if it possesses complete autonomy in regards to who it takes into membership and for whatever reason it chose to take person into membership. Not only is the process of ordination weakening, this is also true of church membership.

What I have discovered through various district and conference meetings, clergy accountability groups, and study, is that ministry standards are being lowered each and every year. It appears that many clergy today have chosen pastoral ministry as a vocation simply as a response to life's challenges. Some, have chosen pastoral ministry in order to support a particular agenda or perhaps for social status. The ordained ministry has become a profitable profession and a great way to become socially active in a hurting and troubled world. This may seem like speculation, but why else would there be so many clergy, so few churches, and a quickly declining membership? Souls are not being saved, and the church still lives in denial.

In recent months, I have spoken to many clergy within the United Methodist Church in regards to our current situation. In every one of them, I find discouragement. Many of them do not trust their District Superintendents and are afraid that any personal information disclosed can and will come back to

haunt them. Many of them have little to no respect for our current Council of Bishops (with some exceptions). And, many of these clergy believe the church is spiraling out of control and will eventually come to a crash landing. Most of these clergy believe that a church split is certainly in our future. Where they disagree is in regards to how long the split will take and what issue will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Most clergy, to whom I have spoken, believe the issue of homosexuality will be that straw. In contrast, I have spoken with many of our denomination's more "liberal" clergy in regards to the same subject matter. Interestingly, most of them believe the church will never split and deny that our current woes are irreversible. When asked about declining membership, one clergy woman retorted, "Our decline is due to the fact we are an aging denomination. All we have to do is figure out better ways to reach out to the younger generation."

The United Methodist Church is a denomination with serious problems. We are continuing to lose members and churches at an alarming rate. The time has come for us to quit living in denial and begin talking about the conflicting core values that exist between the two dominant political polarities that reside within our denomination. I believe a church split is coming sometime in the next six years as a result of growing tension between the two polarities and due to increasing financial distrust. I support that split while holding to my original premise that the merger in 1968 should have never taken place.

## Chapter Five

### Outcomes

When I began this thesis project, I had only one goal in mind, and that was to establish sufficient evidence to support my leaving the United Methodist Church. With every resource read and every interview made, I grew more and more frustrated with my denomination. What I began to discover was that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other clergy in the world that share in my struggles. In addition, I discovered that almost all of them are fully committed to doing whatever it takes to bring about spiritual renewal and systemic transformation to the United Methodist Church.

However, doubt continued to exist within me concerning *my* role within the denomination. That is when I came across the book, *Values Driven Ministry* by Aubrey Malphurs. Through the book, I discovered that certain core values existed within me that needed to come to surface in order to shape my ministry distinctives. Likewise, I began to discover that much of the debating and fighting within my denomination was the result of conflicting core values. The problem was that I didn't recall ever hearing someone speak about core values as they related to particular debates and issues. I was shocked to find that, in many cases, people have been suppressing or hiding their core values in order to manipulate or deceive the rest of the church body.

Malphurs taught me the significance of identifying and implementing those core values into our lives, ministries, and vocations. That is also when I began to



look at the United Methodist Church more critically. Once Dr. Ray Pendleton introduced me to the critical processes of “systems thinking”, I have been looking at things much differently. I began looking at our denomination’s problems as symptomatic instead of problematic. It was then that I began to piece together the thought processes that led me to believe that the problem with the United Methodist Church is polarization. It is the byproduct of our conflicting core values. Therefore, we have been spending entirely too much time as a denomination treating the symptoms while ignoring the problem.

Since reading Malphurs’ book, I have used the concepts learned about core values in developing a survey for pre-marriage counseling. I will use the resource to help the couple in determining the strength of their relationship. Similarly, I have been using the same tool in hiring staff for the church and in appointing laity to serve on particular committees. Understanding how core values affect the way we think, act, and react has been instrumental to my ministry and life. It is also my prayer that such information will help me to bring about change to the United Methodist Church because what I have discovered, above all else, is that God has called me to remain a United Methodist.

The research of the past few years has given me a confidence that the United Methodist Church cannot be saved. The reason for such pessimism is that in order for anyone to change, they must be able to admit they have a problem. Admitting to a problem requires humility and submission to a higher power for assistance. Our denomination leaders consistently deny the problems that surround us, deny the decline of our church, and refuse to take responsibility

for any of the problems that pervade our church. In addition, they have too much to lose in regards to power, money, and political influence. Yet, it's a paradox because I know that God's long arm is able to save anyone who cries out in His name. I just don't believe our leadership will ever cry for help.

In addition, I believe the current systems and structures are not conducive for spiritual renewal or systemic change. Bishop Willimon, Loren Mead, Lyle Schaller, and Maxie Dunnam all seem to agree with each other that current systems are hurting our church. The appointment system is being used as a reward system for those pastors who do what they are told and who pay their apportionments. That same system is being used as a punishment to those pastors who do not do as they are told and pay what they are required. The apportionment system is killing the smaller, rural churches by overextending them financially with demands they cannot endure. This goes on while the larger churches are spending their resources on para-church programs and non-denomination resources in total isolation from the denomination. Lastly, the connectional system has become some sort of god for the denominational leaders. One District Superintendent told me to "quit sending money to self-identified missions/ missionaries and to give the money to the Annual Conference so that, they can do ministry for us".

The systems are sacred cows and the leadership is very protective of the beef. The introduction of our new "Standards of Effective Clergy Leadership" is now being used as a guideline to measure not only clergy effectiveness, but clergy loyalty! Any pastor who fails to measure up to this Jesus-like standard,

can and will be forced out of the denomination. There is no trust. There is no respect. The church is failing and its systems are speeding up the process.

In conclusion, I have come to believe that the United Methodist Church will in fact endure another church split. Probably in the next 2-6 years. The reason will be the result of conflicting values. Many of the conservative theologians and writers believe homosexuality will be our downfall; but, that is just a symptom. The downfall will be our varying core values. By definition, they cannot be compromised (authority of Scripture), they cannot be suppressed (prayer), and they are forever passionate (evangelism). Liberals can take our money, our titles, and even our appointments, but they will never succeed in taking away our Spirit (worship). In the end, the church will split because of our conflicting values coupled with a stubbornness to seize the opportunity for repentance and confession.

#### Recommendations:

Even though the United Methodist Church is on course for another major split, the church's demise could be postponed if major renovations to current systems and personnel were to take place. Diminishing doctrinal standards, ineffective ministries, missional autonomy, evangelism, and clergy effectiveness must be dealt with in a healthy and productive way. Our church government must be downsized and our Wesleyan doctrine and ministry distinctives must be reestablished. All we do as a denomination must be saturated in prayer and our personal agendas, whether liberal or conservative, must be sacrificed in order for God's agendas to be birthed and sustained.

- Discipleship

The problem with United Methodist discipleship is that no two churches teach the same content or share the same values. There has been widespread disappointment with our publishing house in regards to confirmation resources and Church school materials for all age groups. The response from the local churches has been a rejection of their lesson materials in exchange for Bristol House, Group Publishing, and various other evangelistic resources. This increases the polarization and decreases loyalty to the denomination. In recent years, the Disciple Bible Study series Companions in Christ Study have been effective and valued resources among conservatives and liberals. More of that is needed with an intentional approach to helping our denomination reclaim the Wesleyan theology and doctrine that made us great in the beginning.

Further, discipleship needs to become a requirement for all church members and enforced with some form of discipline or accountability plan. From confirmation to small group recovery ministries, each and every member should be forced to participate at the risk of having their membership withdrawn. It worked for John Wesley and the early Methodists, and it will work for today's United Methodist Church. The current problem is that we are too easy on perspective members. We expect nothing from them and get exactly what we expect in return. They are not being challenged and the message is being sent that because we don't enforce discipleship, it must not be important to the Christian walk. What we practice often times dictates what we believe. Discipline and accountability must be reestablished in the local churches. We

must quit allowing our fears to dictate our policies. As one professor told me in seminary, "You are always going to lose people in your ministry; but, how you do ministry determines which ones you lose."

A final component to discipleship is that denomination leaders must deal with the false prophets of our day. In 2002, Bishop C. Joseph Sprague spoke to a group of seminary students in Colorado where he openly denied the virgin birth of Jesus and surprisingly, there were no repercussions.<sup>130</sup> On numerous occasions, our United Methodist clergy have openly performed gay marriages in our churches. In 1999, 68 of our ministers from the California/Nevada Annual Conference "defied denominational policy by joining to bless a same sex union in Sacramento."<sup>131</sup> Again, there were no repercussions. Our church must develop a plan that disciplines these types of rogue pastors. We need a backbone and until we find it, we will continue to decline in membership and influence.

- Evangelism

In order to make evangelism happen at any level, we need pastors who are passionate about Jesus Christ. This should be the responsibility of the Board of Ordained Ministry which screens ordinands and evaluates their calling into ministry. Currently, the board is in the business of recruiting pastors like them (tolerant, inclusive, non-threatening, etc). What is needed is pastors who have truly had a salvation experience and who truly have a calling upon their lives for

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<sup>130</sup> "Complaint Against Bishop C. Joseph Sprague for his Views on Christological Doctrines," Christian Post, 10 Jan. 2003, 5 April 2007  
<<http://www.christianpost.com/article/20030110/1706.htm>>

<sup>131</sup> "Good News to Explore Unity/Separation Issues in New Quadrennium; Says GC Unity Resolution Already Violated," Good News, 26 Aug. 2004, 29 Oct. 2004  
<[http://www.goodnewsmag.org/news/083004Unity\\_Separation.htm](http://www.goodnewsmag.org/news/083004Unity_Separation.htm)>.

the ordained ministry. The Board of Ordained Ministry must regroup and refocus its priorities. Instead of targeting minorities and theological chameleons, we need a system in place that prayerfully discerns the candidates calling and giftedness for ministry. The first time I was up for ordination, I was rejected on the basis of my submitted paperwork. My margins weren't correct! It is time to quit playing games with our confirmands. Let's either cut them loose or validate their calling. We need effective ministers with a heart for evangelism and a commitment to spiritual disciplines.

- Missions

The key to missional growth is autonomy. Currently, the United Methodist Church requires financial commitment through apportionment giving. Any other type of missional giving is discouraged and distrusted. The local churches need to pick and support those ministries and missions that match their own core values. From the conference level, they can be encouraged to visit those missions, get their hands dirty, and to fall in love with those who are receiving their prayerful and financial support.

Secondly, the local churches need to be introduced to the concept of Faith Promise Giving. Where tithe is a horizontal agreement between the church and the giver, Faith giving is a vertical agreement between God and the giver. It begins with a prayerful request to God to unexpectedly send money that may be used for the support of missionaries and missions throughout the world. Then, the person faithfully waits for God to supply them with the money. Faith promises is a method by which people can increase their faith and learn about

missional outreach. Oddly enough, my church of 140 raised \$30,000 for missions last year. We didn't know where the money was coming from, we just trusted God for its provision.

Lastly, the denomination must encourage the local church to get directly involved in missional projects. The conference needs to encourage autonomy in this also. Christians grow best when their hands are dirty. Let's send them out into the world to experience God as He works on the front lines of ministry to a lost world. The church will find that its ability to disciple will increase and that life will be breathed back into the church. To make this happen though, major sacrifices have to be made at the conference and general conference level. Top level boards and agencies will have to give up much of their operating budgets as well as their personal agendas. Currently, large amounts of the denominations missional giving is being used in anti-Iraq war propaganda, abortion administration, the homosexual caucus, and to impeach George Bush petitioning. As long as they continue to misappropriate missional giving, there will be no trust from the local congregations. We need autonomy for our churches. Let them decide where they would like to shift their missional giving. They might even give more!

- Worship

The only recommendation here is for the church to continue spreading autonomy and to create a hymnal which exemplifies that autonomy. The reason so many churches are singing praise songs instead of hymns is because too many of the old Gospel standards are missing in order to accommodate songs

written in multiple languages. People love to sing songs they are familiar with, songs that touch their souls, and songs that connect them to the Father. Our current hymnal does not meet the needs of the majority of our local churches. If we want to better reach the younger generations of adults, we need a hymnal and a theology that matches their needs and wants in a way that also allows God to do His best work in them and through them.

- Connectional Relationships

The most obvious area for needed change must be the reversal of current denominational thinking which believes “the denomination does not exist to support the local church- the local church exists to support the denomination”. Once this teaching is reversed, then apportionments can be reduced to a respectable amount of 10% of a local church’s incoming funds. Currently, my church is paying around 27% of all incoming gifts and tithes to the denomination. That equates to around \$46,000 per year or one full time staff person! The connectional system was not developed until 1921 and was created for the purpose of assisting the local church in giving support. Up until then, the churches were sitting on the funds, not knowing where the greatest needs were, or how to get the money out to meet those needs. Since 1921, the connectional system has become a non-negotiable sacred cow. Failure to participate creates problems for the pastors of those struggling churches in regards to future appointments.

In addition, the church needs to begin allowing pastors to serve longer terms in their churches. The current appointment system does not work! The



current trend reveals that the average stay for a full time pastor is 4-5 years. The result is lost membership and at best, a weak or diminished commitment to their local churches. Longer pastorates are good for the church. It makes long-term ministry possible to existing families and shows stability to those looking for a church home. It is believed that, if politics would be taken out of the appointment equation, the process would go much smoother. The implication is that each year the bishop and the cabinet spend many hours deliberating and praying for the churches in need and the pastors who are available for appointment. The reality seems to suggest that politics and favoritism have a much stronger influence on the process than does prayer. The system no longer works.

#### Conclusions:

Following the 2004 General Conference of the United Methodist Church, Good News, an evangelical renewal ministry within the denomination, made this statement, "In recognition of the threats to the unity of the United Methodist Church today, Good News will begin to examine and explore the issues raised by the proposal for amicable separation and the resolution on unity during the 2004 General Conference."<sup>132</sup> It was at this point, following both general and jurisdictional conferences, that conversations officially began in regards to the amicable separation of our denomination. This marks a new era for the denomination. It is an era of unmerited polarization and an era that will end with a church split.

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<sup>132</sup> "Good News to Explore Unity/Separation Issues in New Quadrennium; Says GC Unity Resolution Already Violated," *Good News*, 26 Aug. 2004, 29 Oct. 2004  
<[http://www.goodnewsmag.org/news/083004Unity\\_Seperation.htm](http://www.goodnewsmag.org/news/083004Unity_Seperation.htm)>.

This thesis project has been very helpful in ascertaining the reason for such an inevitable split. Again, polarization is the problem. It is fueled by a network of conflicting values and is manifest in various symptoms throughout our denomination such as, membership decline, ineffective ministries, and Episcopal distrust. What is the most troubling is that the merger of 1968 should have never taken place. The merger, like any marriage, should have been grounded in godly counsel and bathed in prayer. It should be appalling to all United Methodist that doctrine and theology were not even considered prior to the merger! Clearly, it was a marriage that should have never taken place. The foundation was far too brittle and conflicted.

However, the marriage did take place and for over 40 years since we have all seen the effects of its poorly planned beginning. We have seen the symptoms increase exponentially. We have lost many of our Christian brothers and sisters along the way and we have seen the closing of nearly 7,000 churches. It is my understanding that if a church split does not occur in the next few years, the symptoms will continue to increase and we will see the denomination continue its sad decline.

Surprisingly, denominational leaders do not see the future. They live in denial and perhaps, fear. It is time for them to lead. They could save the United Methodist Church but only when they regain their first love. We celebrate a rich and vibrant history, but a history filled with church splits and schisms. Interestingly, we are a denomination that was born in the midst of controversy and schism. John Wesley, disappointed and frustrated with his own church's

ministry and teaching, set out to begin a renewal movement based on the tenets of Christian perfection and Scriptural holiness. His movement became we call today, the United Methodist Church. So, how can we honestly say that Methodism is all about unity? Methodism has always been about spiritual renewal and I believe that is what we need today and this is one reason why I believe another church split is on the horizon.

Apart from history, I believe the United Methodist Church will split as a result of our current financial problems. Polarization has already caused a great deal of distrust among our boards and agencies. However, what I see happening in the future is a growing spirit of rebellion against the connectional system. The local churches are hurting financially, but conference and connectional budgets continue to rise. The churches simply cannot keep paying for someone else's ministries. It will be a natural progression for the local churches to slowly digress in their support and the only leverage that can be used against them is the threat of losing their pastor. However, if the church is already used to losing their pastors every 3 to 5 years, they won't see that as a viable threat. Even if they were threatened with a part-time pastor verses a full-time pastor, I don't think the local churches will balk. Money is ministry. Without money, churches close!

The future is extremely bleak for the United Methodist Church. It is imperative then for all of us to begin making preparations for a very bumpy ride. Our churches need to be informed about what is happening in our denomination and in our world. They need to be informed so that they can make better decisions when the time comes. They need to be informed in regards to

apportionments, the appointment process, and to denominational politics. We cannot be afraid of hurting people's feelings or of denominational repercussions. We serve only God. It is my prayer that we will all seek to serve Him better, love Him deeper, and serve Him more faithfully. He will see us through. Not matter what happens, He will be there.

## Appendix 1

### Statistical Data of the United Methodist Church<sup>133</sup>

<b>Annual Conference Year:</b>	<b>Total Full Members</b>	<b>Total Clergy Full Connection</b>	<b>Total Number of Churches</b>	<b>Total Professions of Faith</b>
1969	10,871,689	34,651	40,644	202,610
1970	10,784,318	34,561	40,653	205,532
1971	10,622,173	30,040	40,054	217,164
1972	10,452,989	29,947	39,626	219,943
1973	10,306,210	29,923	39,395	210,194
1974	10,155,921	30,079	39,195	214,589
1975	9,921,136	30,128	38,795	219,195
1976	9,828,767	30,195	38,744	210,740
1977	9,754,945	30,284	38,682	206,274
1978	9,693,106	30,420	38,576	195,979
1979	9,615,631	30,601	38,444	197,970
1980	9,548,284	30,877	38,417	209,894
1981	9,481,891	31,141	38,298	211,832
1982	9,419,206	31,372	38,181	211,492
1983	9,359,024	31,396	38,045	207,589
1984	9,301,863	31,621	37,988	199,646
1985	9,230,466	31,842	37,876	194,761
1986	9,154,090	32,122	37,750	194,501
1987	9,086,449	32,427	37,641	186,418
1988	9,015,722	32,718	37,514	185,606
1989	8,935,562	32,906	37,407	190,436
1990	8,872,370	33,101	37,295	196,628
1991	8,811,522	33,349	37,100	197,330
1992	8,750,121	33,549	36,982	194,656
1993	8,678,923	33,575	36,771	188,089
1994	8,611,021	33,511	36,559	190,685
1995	8,549,007	33,526	36,361	196,481
1996	8,449,744	33,499	36,170	194,927
1997	8,457,227	34,135	35,986	204,793
1998	8,405,746	34,247	35,784	200,678
1999	8,356,816	34,357	35,609	199,228
2000	8,334,204	34,409	35,469	196,928
2001	8,229,445	34,379	35,275	203,452
2002	8,258,352	34,308	35,102	200,229
2003	8,204,525	34,190	34,892	188,273

<sup>133</sup> The General Council on Finance and Administration, General Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church 1970-2003, (Nashville: General Council on Finance and Administration, 1970-2003).

## Appendix 2

### Statistical Data of the Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church<sup>134</sup>

Annual Conference Year	Total Full Members* (Line 1)	Total Full Members* (Line 9)	Total Professions of Faith	Members (+/-)
1996**	190,916	187,571	4,336	(-) 3,345
1997	187,571	184,335	4,258	(-) 3,236
1998	180,022	176,358	3,518	(-) 3,664
1999	176,251	172,554	3,571	(-) 3,697
2000	172,554	168,829	3,302	(-) 3,725
2001	168,636	164,495	3,205	(-) 4,141
2002	164,495	159,658	2,863	(-) 4,837
2003	159, 657	155,264	2,792	(-) 4,393
2004	155,264	152,118	2,814	(-) 3,232
2005	152,032	149,003	2,979	(-) 3,029

\*Line 1 of Statistical Table 1 reports the Total Full Members Reported at the close of the previous year. Line 9 of Statistical Table 1 reports the Total Full Members Reported at the close of the current year. The total reported in Line 9 seldom matches the total reported in Line 1 of the following year. For clarity purposes, this chart will just report the numbers published in each year's journal and is not responsible for matching the previous year's numbers.

\*\* 1996 was the first year of the Merger involving the Central Illinois UMC and the Southern Illinois UMC.

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<sup>134</sup> Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference, Official Journal-Yearbook 1996-2006, (Springfield: Illinois Great Rivers Annual Conference, 1996-2006).

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